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**THESIS**

**ETHNIC CONFLICT IN INDONESIA: CAUSES AND  
RECOMMENDED MEASURES**

by

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December 2005

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**ETHNIC CONFLICT IN INDONESIA: CAUSES AND RECOMMENDED  
MEASURES**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
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## **ABSTRACT**

This research examines ethnic conflicts in Indonesia from 1998 to 2004 in an attempt to identify their underlying causes by using two case studies of ethnic conflict, one on Maluku Island and one in Poso, Central Sulawesi. The lessons learned that I drew from those two case studies address the questions, of why have ethnic conflicts in Indonesia taken place more frequently since 1998 and what the best strategies for the Indonesian government to use to prevent the eruption of ethnic conflicts in Indonesia in the future? With regard to the lessons learned from Maluku and Poso, this research generally concludes that underlying factors such as political disputes, economic and social disparities, religious and cultural differences, and tribal disputes have contributed to the current ethnic conflicts in Indonesia. Among the underlying factors, political disputes and economic and social disparities outweighed the other factors and played a more significant role in triggering the initial conflicts. This research contributes valuable information to the Indonesian government and non-governmental organizations in dealing with future ethnic conflicts in Indonesia.

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

After the Asian monetary crisis struck Indonesia in 1998 and the resignation of President Suharto in that same year, Indonesia became overwhelmed by several serious ethnic conflicts. These conflicts have inflicted enormous casualties and severely damaged many government assets and private properties. The recent rise of ethnic conflicts in Indonesia recently has made many scholars both in Indonesia and foreign countries raise some important questions. They include: Why have ethnic conflicts in Indonesia taken place more frequently since 1998 and what are the best strategies the Indonesian government can use to prevent the eruption of similar ethnic conflicts in Indonesia in the future?

In response to the questions above, this research uses two case studies regarding ethnic conflict, in Maluku Island and Poso in Central Sulawesi, to examine the underlying factors that triggered the initial conflicts. In addition, the case studies also provide useful information about the chronology of conflict within both areas in more detail and explain how the conflict evolved into large-scale violence. With regard to the lessons learned that are drawn from the ethnic conflicts in Maluku and Poso, this research generally concludes that underlying factors such as political disputes, economic and social disparities, religious and cultural differences, and tribal disputes have contributed to the current ethnic conflicts in Indonesia. Nonetheless, among those underlying factors, political disputes and economic and social disparities outweighed the other factors and played a more significant role in triggering the initial conflict. Recommended measures for preventing similar future ethnic conflicts in Indonesia are provided based on the research conclusions about ethnic conflict in Maluku and Poso.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

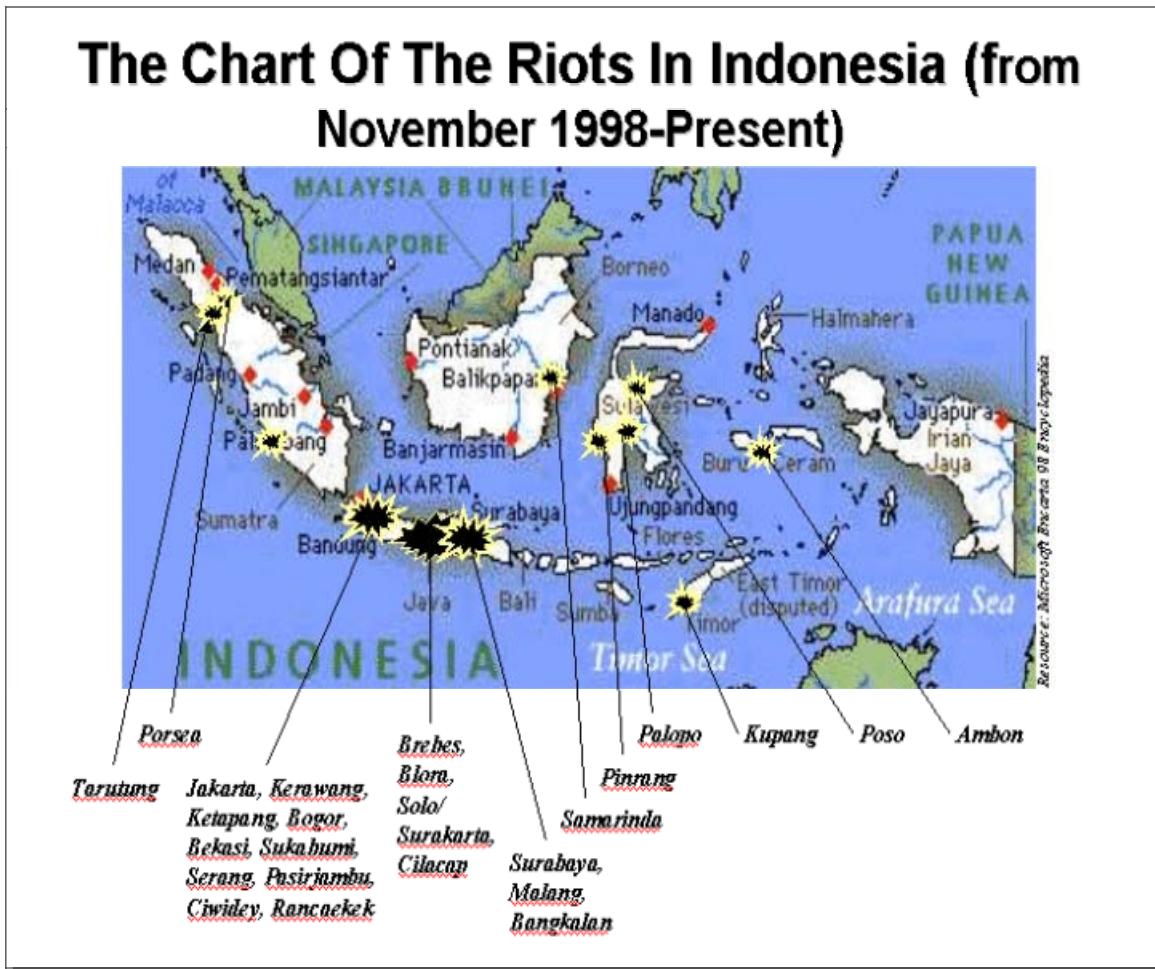


Figure 1. The Chart of the Riots in Indonesia (From: <[www.Fica.org](http://www.Fica.org)> (accessed November 11, 2005))

Indonesia has experienced several severe ethnic conflicts since 1998. The anti-Chinese riots in Jakarta and Dayak and the Madurese conflict in Kalimantan, as well as ethno-religious conflicts in Molluca and Poso from 1998 to 2001 revealed a radical change in Indonesian ethnic relations. The New Order regime under President Soeharto was able to prevent the eruption of ethnic conflicts in Indonesia and generally maintained a peaceful co-existence. Though we cannot say that the New Order regime was a completely peaceful regime in 1998, we can, at least, say that security conditions before the collapse of the regime were better than they are now. These two contrasting

situations in Indonesia raise a nagging question as to why current ethnic conflicts in Indonesia have become far more intense than during the previous decade.

The search for an explanation for current ethnic conflicts in Indonesia is now an imperative for government agencies. Policymakers, politicians, government officials, and military commanders feel that Indonesia is encircled by a ring of violence. If the violence does not stop immediately, it could spread throughout the country. These are many reasons for this. Indonesia consists of three hundred ethnic groups with different religious and cultural backgrounds. In addition, recent demographic shifts, political changes, and rapid economic globalization have made many Indonesian regions more vulnerable.

However, in regard to Indonesia in particular, there are many people who believe that the ethnic conflict will not become widely spread. They argue that Indonesia cannot be compared to the Balkans or Africa and that Indonesia will never turn into another Balkan region. This is because of the cultural, political, economic and religious differences between Indonesia and the Balkans or Africa. This argument is true insofar as many current ethnic conflicts in Indonesia have been contained. However, with regard to a certain degree of uniqueness of ethnic conflicts, it is hard to predict whether it will become contagious. Moreover, once a conflict exists, it often spreads quickly, leaving many lives destroyed. It can even turn into genocide, as was the case in Rwanda and Bosnia. Therefore, the ignorance or unawareness of the Indonesian people about the contagious effect of ethnic conflicts could lead to extreme situations, such as an extensive ethno-religious conflict or, ultimately the disintegration of the nation.

To explain how ethnic conflicts in Indonesia evolved over time after the collapse of President Suharto's regime in 1998, I will present some theories from several studies of Indonesian ethnic conflicts. These studies help to explain, theoretically and empirically, the root causes of ethnic conflicts in Indonesia and the reason they became more intensive after 1998, when, politically and economically, Indonesia was in a bad shape. Some writers cite the economic crisis and the collapse of President Suharto's regime in 1998 as two major factors that triggered the ethnic conflicts, while others argue that a tendency for such conflicts had been embedded in Indonesian culture for a long time.

## A. EXISTING THEORIES OF ETHNIC CONFLICT IN INDONESIA

First, I will examine the theory of ethnic conflict provided by Jacques Bertrand in his book *Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict in Indonesia*. Quoting Paul Brass, Richard Snyder, Benedict Anderson, and Clifford Geertz, Bertrand suggests three major approaches that have been used to explain “why ethnicity sometimes becomes a channel for political struggle and conflict.”<sup>1</sup> First, those who use “constructivist” approaches argue that historical and social circumstances can shape, transform, and define ethnic boundaries, and form the bases of conflict. Second, “instrumentalist” approaches emphasize the role of ethnic elites in competition for state power, resources, and private interests: they mobilize mass support by using the emotional appeals of ethnic identity to achieve their goals. Third, “primordialist” approaches focus on “the inheritance of ethnic traits by birth and the immutability of group boundaries.” To put it succinctly, “ethnic groups are seen as inherently prone to hostility by the nature of their group.”<sup>2</sup> These three main approaches are used not only by Bertrand to draw a preliminary hypothesis for his analysis of Indonesia but also by other scholars to explain ethnic conflict in other regions such as Africa and the Balkans.

With regard to ethnic conflict in Indonesia, Bertrand argues that conflict does not derive from group identities as is the case other regions such as Rwanda (the conflict between Hutus and Tutsis). Instead, it can best be explained by looking at the emergence of group anxieties produced by the changing political, cultural, social, and political circumstances. Therefore, “group fears and grievances are... rooted in the context in which ethnic identities are constructed and mobilized.” In addition, most of the time, group fears, tensions, or grievances are out of sight, “with the most common forms of political action remaining in the realm of the ‘hidden transcript.’” Publicly, ethnic groups display how cordial their relations are, how peaceful their coexistence with one another is, and even how they support inter-ethnic cooperation. Nonetheless, this outward appearance of harmony is misleading; it conceals “a hidden transcript of acrimony, grumbling, suspicion, and even hatred.”<sup>3</sup> Bertrand proceeds to analyze Indonesia’s

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<sup>1</sup> Jacques Bertrand. *Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict in Indonesia*. New York: Cambridge, 2004, p. 10.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 10-11.

<sup>3</sup> Jacques Bertrand. *Nationalism*, op. cit., pp. 10-11.

national model and its institutionalization during the New Order, in the late 1990s when the social, political, economic and cultural context abruptly changed along ethnic lines, resulting in a flare-up of ethnic conflicts. He claims that his analysis of that “critical juncture” partly explains current ethnic conflicts in Indonesia.<sup>4</sup>

In the late 1990s, the Indonesian people considered renegotiating their national model and institutions. But the wider opportunity provided during this period caused uncertainty among many groups who sought to renegotiate the terms of their exclusion or inclusion and the allocation of power and resources. Previously, tensions among groups had already been high due to perceptions of discrimination and injustice, but the possible reaction from most groups toward these issues remained relatively neutral. When exogenous factors such as the economic crisis, regime transition, and other important domestic events coincided in Indonesia in 1998, a crisis, or critical juncture, resulted that abruptly altered ethnic relation. And a period of transformation created volatile relations between ethnic groups. Hence, politicians and conflict entrepreneurs used these circumstances to mobilize mass support in order to pursue their private interests, either political or economic, which eventually led to ethnic conflicts.<sup>5</sup> To better illustrate what that critical juncture involved, Bertrand presented the following diagram:

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<sup>4</sup> “Critical junctures are triggered by exogenous factors or emerge out of tensions created by previous institutionalized forms of ethnic relations. At these junctures, violence tends to occur as anxieties rise and ethnic group become uncertain about past compromises and institutional settings,” Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., pp. 9-27.

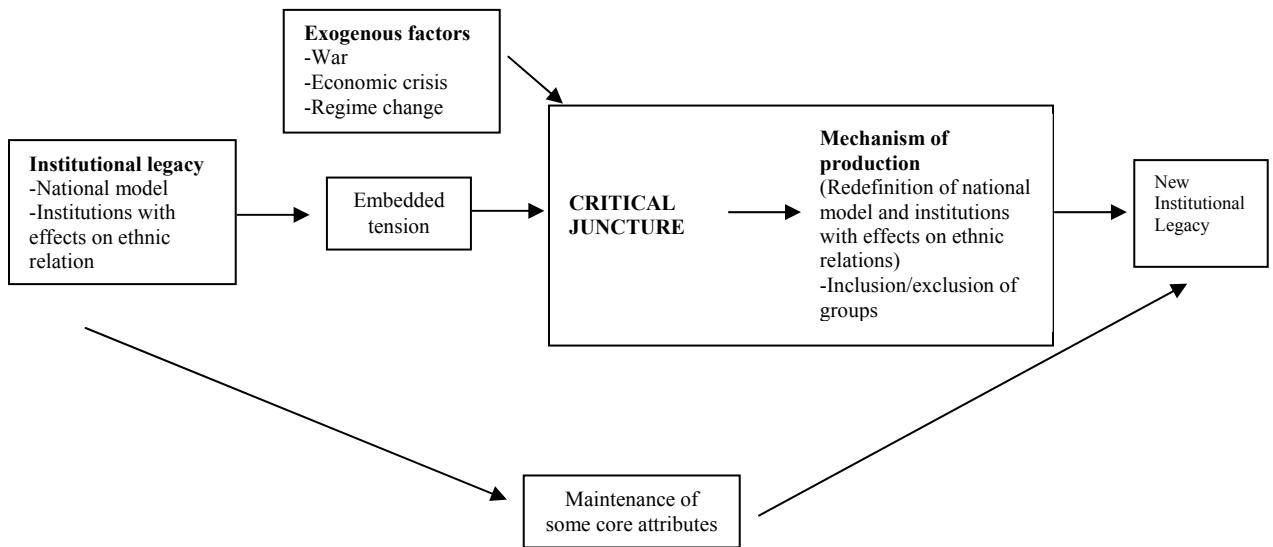


Figure 2. Critical Junctures, National Models, and Ethnic Relations

Bertrand's theory has been both corroborated and challenged by others. Some have elaborated on the mechanisms of control, especially the role of coercion under Suharto. These mechanisms were useful in maintaining the national model supported by the regime. For example, it is pointed out that "Indonesia under Suharto was on the whole relatively peaceful because it had the political, administrative, and military mechanisms to discipline the eruption of social disaffection, and it is the end of the New Order and the collapse of its disciplinary mechanisms that account for the violence of recent years."<sup>6</sup> This argument is supported by Lorraine Aragon who did research on the Moslem-Christian conflict in Poso. During her time in Poso, she was repeatedly told by people that for thirty-two years, during the New Order regime under President Suharto's leadership, Poso had been a peaceful place but violence was everywhere now. According to Aragon, military control mechanisms accounted for the relatively peaceful conditions during the New Order and prevented the expressions of communal dissatisfaction.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Varshney Ashutosh, Rizal Pangabeaan, and Mohammad Zulfan Tadioeddin. "Patterns of Collective Violence in Indonesia (1990-2003)." United Nations Support Facility for Indonesian Recovery. Working Paper-04/0. Jakarta, 2004, p. 20.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

Others add that the logic of Indonesia's ethnic conflict is embedded in "the very institutions of the New Order [which] created profound social and political exclusion, bred distrust of the state, and often relied on overt violence." Within the ethno-religious confinement of the "national model" during the New Order, the Dayaks and Papuans were excluded for their lack of modernity, the Chinese for their lack of nativity, and the Moslems on the basis of their ideology. At a very significant level, these models of exclusion could only be sustained by coercion. However, coercion itself was not able to keep a system running forever and violence tended to breed violence. Studying the institutional characteristics during the New Order allows one to understand more fully why only some groups were targeted during the conflict such as the Chinese, the Madurese and the Bugese. It also gives plausible answers as to why conflict or violence was concentrated in some geographical regions of Indonesia and not more generalized.<sup>8</sup>

Nonetheless, some disagree with Bertrand that the overall conditions in Indonesia during the New Order were peaceful. Several incidents such as the massacre of hundreds of thousands of Communists in the mid-1960s, the Tanjung Priok riot in 1984, the labor strikes in the Southern part of Surabaya in May 1993, and the anti-Chinese riot in 1998, and many others challenge the assumption that the New Order regime was peaceful. In fact, it can be argued that conflict has been embedded in Indonesian culture and society for a long time. The current conflict is not only the legacy of the New Order but also part of a longer historical tradition of violence. This argument is supported by historical evidence of violence from a study by Colombijn and Nordholt. There were many cases of thieves and pickpockets caught red-handed and were killed by the mob, such as in 1904 in Central Java, around 1909 in Poso, Central Sulawesi, and in 1882 in West Sumatera. Another example of historical violence concerned the *jago* during the 19 century in Java. These were bullies used by the colonial government to extract revenues and to intimidate people. Although historical and cultural perspectives contribute greatly to explaining the current conflict in Indonesia, culture cannot fully answer the question as to "why did a mere 15 Kabupaten (districts), which contain only 6.5 per cent of Indonesia's total population, have as much as 85.5 per cent of all deaths in collective violence between

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<sup>8</sup> Varshney Ashutosh et al. "Patterns," op. cit., pp. 26-27.

1990 and 2003?"<sup>9</sup> There are still many regions in Indonesia where peace is still preserved and the people get along with one another during long periods of time.

While the above studies focus especially on long-term processes, there are others that examine more immediate causes, such as demographic shifts caused by government policy of transmigration, competing interests in local resources and power, inter-group interaction and psychological factors. According to Tri Nuke Pudjiastuti,

ethnic tension actually is not a recent phenomenon. It already had potential in Indonesia and the seeds of conflict [one of which was the poorly prepared transmigration policy] were planted for more than 30 years ago, when the complex process of state-making did not create a political space for pluralism, but more uniforms.<sup>10</sup>

Thus recent conflicts in Molluca, Poso, Mataram, and Kalimantan were caused by long-lasting conflicts of interest between indigenous people and migrants. This pattern of conflict grows especially in the regions which actually had had religious harmony. The shift in the demographic composition due to migration changed the balance of power. Political and economic competition and inequality between settlers and migrants quickly polarized both groups that altered existing ethnic relations. Therefore, even small clashes between indigenous people and migrants could lead to an ethnic conflict.

Another study sponsored by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) agrees that the central dynamic of communal conflict, including ethnic conflict, is "competition between regional elites over access to political and economic power."<sup>11</sup> Ethnic, religious and cultural divisions were aggravated and worsened for years in Indonesia through political competition and exclusion, excessive repression, demographic shifts, and government economic policies that favored a small group of people who were close to the central power. Grievance and greed were fueled by the economic crisis in 1998 and the anticipation of the advantages that might be gained from *otonomi daerah* (decentralization) following the collapse of the New Order regime. What made matters worse is that in the areas where conflicts would erupt, "patronage

<sup>9</sup> Varshney Ashutosh, et al. op. cit., pp. 26-27.

<sup>10</sup> Tri Nuke Pudjiastuti. "Migration and Conflict in Indonesia." IUSSP Regional Population Conference in Bangkok, June 2002, pp. 2-3.

<sup>11</sup> Sharon Morris, et. al. "Conflict in Indonesia." United States Agency for International Development, January 2002, p. 6.

networks and personal connections are often the only route to economic opportunity.” It is thus natural that elites turned to these networks, which are often ethnically based, in order to mobilize large number of young, unemployed men.” State and social institutions were ill-equipped to deal with the dynamics of tension in the current political conditions and even actively fed the causes of conflict.<sup>12</sup>

What has been missing from the above studies is the role of laws and social norms and the dynamics of ethnic conflict once started. These factors are the focus of a World Bank study.<sup>13</sup> In this study, the researchers suggest two realms that have to be carefully looked at, first, the “rules of the game” which means the norms and laws that form the immediate context, where disputants, their representatives, and mediators involve one another. The second realm is the “dynamic of difference” that relates to the norms and politics of ethnic relations. Within this realm, the researchers focus on the ways and means the differences are constructed and “are able to be mobilized, re-imagined, and exploited for strategic advantage.”<sup>14</sup>

The “rules of the game” explains the rule system within society that regulates people’s behavior in response to social conditions. By doing so, people can understand how political, social and economic relations are constructed and how people and their communities communicate with one another. The researchers argue that understanding the rule system is critical for explaining the current ethnic conflict in Indonesia. Based on that statement, the researchers develop a theory by stating that conflicts are less likely to step up and even turn into violence if most people within a society have “a collective sense of what behavior is acceptable.” Conversely, conflicts will escalate into violence when the rule system that governs people’s behavior is disputed and people tend to engage in provocative and eventually conflict of behavior. This outcome might be the results of the following possible events. First, people do not realize that their behavior violates the other party’s rules. Second, although people understand the other rule of laws

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<sup>12</sup> Sharon Morris, et. al. “Conflict,” op. cit., p. 7.

<sup>13</sup> Patrick Barron, Claire Q. Smith, and Michael Woolcock. “Understanding Local Level Conflict in Developing Countries: Theory, Evidence and Implications from Indonesia.” Conflict Prevention and Reconstruction. Paper No. 19. Indonesia, 2004, p. 10.

<sup>14</sup> The authors also discusses another realm which centers on the role of mediators, leaders, and government officials in conflict resolution.

that is applicable to them, they tend to ignore them. Lastly, some people want to benefit from the confusion of the existing rule of laws and tend to interpret them differently.<sup>15</sup> The possible violation of the rule system within current Indonesian society is mainly influenced by globalization which enables people to move more easily from one area to another. In effect, the demographic change and the shift from a homogenous to heterogeneous society that have brought more people with different customary laws, rule systems and norms together in one place have made this society more complicated than ever before.

The second realm is the “dynamic of difference” between groups which constitutes how intra-group norms, interests and identity are determined, and in turn, “the corresponding bases and political salience of differences between groups may fluctuate.” Thus, based on the researchers’ field studies, they argue that there are two ways how the “dynamic of difference” between groups can lean to a conflict. First, the researchers posit what they call the “mechanism for mobilizing group identity.” According to them, there are many ways that can be used by leaders to mobilize group identity for the purpose of conflict. The most common way observed in Indonesia was the encouragement of a particular group of people to fear others. Other ways of mobilizing people for the purpose of conflict are through political and economic gains. However, no mechanism for mobilizing group identity for the purpose of conflict will be as effective as it can be when channeled through traditional social systems such as those that control the distribution of water and land allotment based on ethnicity. The other way of creating a conflict through “the dynamic of difference” between groups is to reinforce divisive identities. This method, according to this study, is dependent on the group leaders’ capacity to reframe and reinforce group identity for the conflict. In most circumstances, this method is especially vital when deployed during the evolution of conflict and the escalation phase. In addition, when the very basic identity of one group is under attack, reframing and reinforcing group identity can intensify a group’s boundary that formerly may have been less distinct.<sup>16</sup> These methods are argued to cause local ethnic conflicts to escalate quickly in Kalimantan, Poso, and Maluku.

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<sup>15</sup> Patrick Barron, et. al. “Understanding,” op. cit., p. 10.

<sup>16</sup> Patrick Barron, et. al. “Understanding,” op. cit., pp. 26-27.

The “dynamic of difference” suggests the importance of inter-group interaction on a socio-economic level but does not deal adequately with psychological factors that operate either on participant at the individual level or between groups. For this we have to turn to a study by Ichsan Malik, who examines the way conflict can be triggered by “stereotypes” that label a particular ethnicity during their interaction.<sup>17</sup> According to Ichsan, a “stereotype” is a preliminary and irresponsible judgment on characteristics that belong to a group of people and most of the times are negative. Then, by having a particular ethnic “stereotypes” in their minds, people tend to generalize about other people within that group. In effect, these kinds of situation create a discriminatory perspective against others and can potentially escalate into violence if other factors such as socio-economy, politics and culture are involved.

None of the above theories on ethnic conflict in Indonesia are either wholly wrong or completely accurate. Each of them has its own weaknesses and strengths. Bertrand’s theory of critical juncture attempts to reach a deeper level in explaining the ethnic conflict in Indonesia and moves from a discussion of ethnic identity to an examination of ethnic anxiety, which was aroused during the transitional period. Bertrand offers a powerful answer to the question why ethnic conflicts in Indonesia took place far more intensely after 1998 when people renegotiated the terms of their exclusion and inclusion. However, his theory does not touch upon the underlying factors that triggered the initial conflict in many regions in Indonesia such as local political disputes and economic and social disparities. While immediate factors have been further elaborated by later studies, his model may overlook the fact that conflict may have been embedded in Indonesian culture and society for a long time. Finally, his theory cannot explain exactly how the initial conflict (individual or group clashes) escalated into large-scale ethnic conflicts such as in the case of Poso and Maluku during 1998-2001. I believe that it is important for scholars to look more deeply at the local level in order to better understand and explain the current ethnic conflicts in Indonesia. For instance, how local political disputes and economics disparities exacerbated by other contingent factors have contributed to large-scale ethnic conflicts.

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<sup>17</sup> Ichsan Malik. “Kontribusi Psikososial dalam Penanganan Konflik.” (Socio-Psychological Contribution in Ethnic Conflict Resolution). University of Indonesia, March 3, 2005.

Pudjiastuti's study of the migration program makes an important contribution by explaining how the conflict of interests between migrants and the indigenous people escalated overtime and eventually led to violence. In addition, the theory also explains, when the conflict erupted, why only particular groups of people became targets such as, the Chinese, Bugesse, Butonese, and Javanese. Nonetheless, the theory cannot appropriately explain why only some areas of migration experienced a large-scale of ethnic conflict while others did not. In addition, the theory also cannot fully explain why most areas that have been experienced ethnic conflict were relatively peaceful prior to the conflict. For these issues, one has to look at the role of local norms, the dynamic of ethnic mobilization based on ethnic differences, and psychological processes that shape or transform the basis of conflict. These arguments better explain how ethnic conflicts in Indonesia took place within some areas such as in Poso, Maluku, and Kalimantan. Their weakness is that, by focusing on immediate causes, they do not fully explain why those conflicts took place more intensely after 1998.

In sum, theories of ethnic conflict in Indonesia have contributed positively to explaining why ethnic conflicts in Indonesia have occurred more frequently since 1998. Ethnic conflict in Indonesia is indeed not a new issue; it has been embedded in society for years even before Indonesia was formed. Nonetheless, the very dynamics of Indonesian development influenced by internal and external challenges have brought Indonesia to encounter more serious ethnic conflict problems, potentially constituting both an obstacle to development and providing the fuel for a larger scale of violence. By identifying the strengths and weaknesses of existing theories on Indonesia's ethnic conflict, I hope that I will be able to clarify some of those gaps. I also hope to be able to add to existing theories with empirical evidence I collect.

## **B. THESIS PURPOSES AND ARGUMENTS**

This thesis examines ethnic conflicts in Indonesia and attempt to identify their underlying causes based on two case studies of ethnic conflict that occurred recently in Indonesia, namely the conflict in Maluku (Molluca) and the one that occurred in Poso in Central Sulawesi. These case studies are selected because they share several characteristics commonly observed in all ethnic conflicts in Indonesia, such as the role of indigenous people and migrants and the devastating outcomes in people's lives and

properties. The curious fact is that people in the conflict areas lived together peacefully before violence started, and for the most part, these conflicts were initially triggered by economic and social, political, religious and cultural differences. Based on the lessons learned in Maluku and Poso, some generalizations about ethnic conflicts in Indonesia are made, together with recommended measures to prevent future conflicts. The analyses are based on library research, my military experience on dealing with ethnic conflicts, and my own perspective about current ethnic conflicts as an Indonesian.

The two case studies on ethnic conflict in Maluku and Poso suggest a generalizable pattern of ethnic conflict in Indonesia. First, the more significant ethnic conflicts stemmed from relatively minor individual clashes involving monetary issues or alcohol abuse and no one could have predicted that those conflicts would escalate. Second, once a conflict erupted, it quickly got out of control and spread to other areas. Third, the outcomes of the conflicts were devastating, with considerable damage done to material goods and to people's lives, as many became isolated because of their ethnicity and religion. Fourth, the escalation of comparatively minor confrontations into large-scale ethnic conflicts was partly because the local police, security forces and courts failed to properly address the initial disputes in keeping with existing laws. Fifth, the prolonged conflicts were hard to control because of the existence of cyclical revenge within and between warring parties and the involvement of third parties and conflict entrepreneurs, which continually undermined the government's reconciliation efforts.

Based on the case studies, the central argument here is that the initial conflicts within most of the conflict areas in Indonesia were triggered by underlying local factors—political disputes, economic and social disparities, religious and cultural differences, and tribal disputes. Furthermore, the more intensely these underlying factors were present in one area, the more likely ethnic conflict took place in that area. These factors have been embedded in Indonesian society for a long time. During the New Order regime, which imposed political, administration and military mechanism to discipline public dissatisfaction, the reaction toward differences or disputes was predictably muted. After 1998 onward, however, under the context of what Bertrand called exogenous factors such as regime change, economic crisis, and democratization, latent disputes and differences within Indonesian people intensified and eventually surfaced.

It is also argued here that political disputes and economic and social disparities outweighed other factors. There was a clear relationship between the eruption of conflict and local political disputes according to ethnic lines and religious affiliations in some areas such as in Poso and Maluku. Each conflict mostly started during political campaigns for strategic positions either for *Bupati* or *Sekretaris Daerah*. Moreover, economic and social disparities usually between migrants and indigenous people also exacerbated the political disputes in conflict areas. In short, we can see that even a small clash can lead to large-scale ethnic conflict when combined with economic, social and political factors.

Here is an overview of the structure of the thesis, which proceeds in four sections. Chapter II presents the issue of ethnic conflict in Maluku and its five underlying factors. These factors involve five different issues, including political disputes, economic and social disparities, religious and cultural differences, and tribal disputes. Chapter III describes the conflict in Poso, Central Sulawesi and its underlying factors, which also involve the same five issues as in Maluku. Chapter IV concludes the thesis with several recommended measures for preventing future conflicts.

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## II. ETHNIC CONFLICT IN MALUKU: THE COLLAPSE OF PEACEFUL SOCIETY

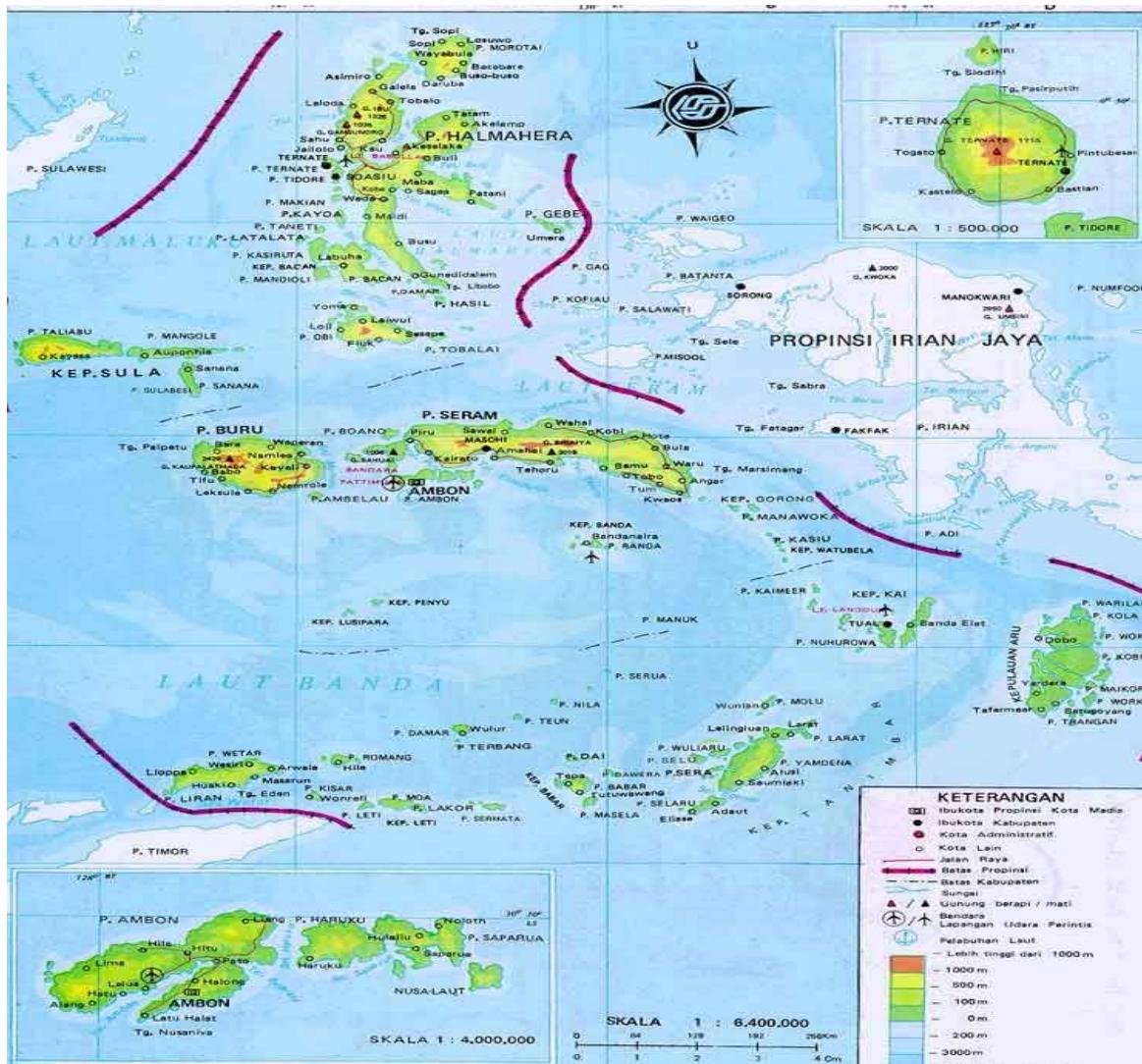


Figure 3. The Map of Maluku (From:  
[www.accommodationsbali.com/maps/maluku.html](http://www.accommodationsbali.com/maps/maluku.html)) (accessed November 11, 2005))

### A. INTRODUCTION

The Maluku archipelago is one of Indonesia's provinces; Ambon was its capital city until 1999. In the year 2000, Maluku was divided into two provinces, the Province of Maluku and the Province of North Maluku. Both provinces are located in the zone between three degrees north latitude, eight to thirty degrees south latitude, and 124 degrees, 45 minutes, to 135 degrees east longitude. Their geographical borders are the

Pacific Ocean in the north, the Arafura Sea in the south, the Maluku Sea in the west, and Papua Island in the east. The total areas of both provinces combined cover approximately 721,479.69 km<sup>2</sup>, of which 658,294.69 km<sup>2</sup> are sea areas and 74.505 km<sup>2</sup> are land areas.<sup>18</sup>

Known primarily for its natural resources, Maluku was once also known as a peaceful region where multiethnic people had lived side by side peacefully for almost a hundred years. Maluku has also been a place that people with different religious backgrounds migrated to for a variety of reasons. Historically, Maluku, known as the “Spice Island” in the colonial period, was a source of trade for the Chinese, the Portuguese and the Dutch. As in the past, due to its various advantages Maluku is still a Promised Land for trade for peoples from nearby islands. Many who came to Maluku stayed, living from generation to generation without having any significant social or cultural problems with the indigenous people. Indeed, diversity, with all its dynamics, was never an obstacle for the people there because they lived in peace and with toleration.

However, over the years, the number of newcomers increased significantly, and the indigenous population began to feel threatened by their overwhelming number. Several minor conflicts between migrants and indigenous people occurred; tension gradually spread throughout the society and has recently escalated. Without the people realizing it, the societal structure in Maluku had changed significantly, resulting in inequality. Job distribution, the division of labor, political and bureaucratic competition, land transfers from indigenous owners to migrants and religious tensions due to the structural societal changes were some of the issues among the people that began to ruin their long-time harmonious lifestyle. As a result, the area became divided along cultural, religious, and social-economic lines. Change in the societal structure of Maluku has led to increasing conflict.

In 1997, Indonesia began experiencing severe economic crises that affected people’s lives at every strata of society. In 1998, President Soeharto’s administration

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<sup>18</sup> Tapak Ambon. “Refugees of Maluku and North Maluku and Their Problems.” In Tapak Ambon paper. (April 17, 2003). <<http://www.titane.org/files/artikelen/tapak/artikel6.htm>> (accessed March 10, 2004).

collapsed and he was replaced by President B.J. Habibie. The transitional government and its initial embrace of a more democratic system, which paralleled the economic crisis, resulted in Indonesia's current chaotic economic and political system. Subsequently, on January 19, 1999, Maluku experienced a tremendous ethnic conflict that immediately spread throughout the islands and resulted in the Indonesian armed forces and police losing control. The toll of the conflict, Moslem and Christian, is estimated as approximately 5,000 people who died and more than 700,000 who were displaced.<sup>19</sup> The horrible ethnic conflict in Maluku is a religious communal conflict such as Indonesia has not had since its struggle for independence in 1945 from the Dutch. Arguably, the economic crisis in 1997, the collapse of President Soeharto's administration, and Indonesia's initial embrace of a more democratic system have resulted in an outbreak of severe ethnic conflict in Maluku, starting in January 1999.

If we begin at the local level and analyze how the initial conflict escalated into a larger ethnic conflict, we may find an answer to why ethnic conflict was able to break out at all in Maluku. With regard to that question, I will argue that there were several underlying factors that made Maluku more susceptible to ethnic conflict in late 1998. Among those underlying factors, political disputes and economic and social disparities outweighed all others and were responsible for triggering the initial conflict between two youths from different religious affiliations. Eventually, that small conflict escalated into a large conflict between Moslems and Christians. The initial individual dispute was also exacerbated by latent tribal disputes between the Bugese and the local Ambonese, the tribes to which the two youths belonged. In effect, the tribal difference attracted additional people from each group to engage in the conflict. Furthermore, in the case of conflict in Maluku in particular, I find a connection between the local conflict and the roles of national actors. Indeed, many people believe that national elites and politicians were involved in triggering a local conflict so that they could pursue a political agenda and undermine President Wahid's administration. However, the conflict was soon beyond national elites' and politician's control. And when conflict entrepreneurs intervened, they left behind tremendous devastation in both Maluku and its surrounding islands.

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<sup>19</sup> International Crisis Group. "Indonesia: Memburu Perdamaian in Maluku" (Indonesia: Seeking for Peace in Maluku). In ICG Asia Report No. 31. February 8, 2002, p. 1.

From a broader scope, at the national level, borrowing Bertrand's arguments about the "critical juncture" that occurred in Indonesia around 1997 through 1998, I believe that the national crises affected the overall stability of Maluku's politics, economy, and security. Thus, exogenous factors such as the collapse of the New Order regime and the economic crisis created a moment when most people in Indonesia, including the people of Maluku, renegotiated their political power-sharing and identity, better known by the terms "inclusion" and "exclusion." An effort to renegotiate political power-sharing and to reframe group identities intensifies the boundaries among groups that were previously less distinguishable and, possibly, escalates inter-group tensions. In addition, a conflict that, in effect, reframes group identities, may occur in areas where religious or ethnic hegemony is an essential factor shaping people's daily societal lives and determining their relations with each other. In regard to Maluku, in particular, religion plays a big role in determining every aspect of people's lives, be it political, economic, cultural, or social. Therefore, when conflict touched upon religious issues, it spread immediately and quickly polarized people.

In this chapter, I will describe the ethnic conflict in Maluku in some detail. First, I will discuss Maluku's conflict chronologically, from 1998 to 2004. Second, I will examine the underlying factors within its society that led Maluku to become more susceptible to ethnic conflict. Third, I will explore the Indonesian government's response to the conflict in Maluku, because I believe that all these issue combined provide a more comprehensive picture of Maluku's conflicts. Furthermore, by explaining these issues, using the conflict in Maluku as a case study, I hope to find a substantial answer to my main thesis questions: Why have ethnic conflicts occurred frequently in Indonesia since 1998? Were the conflicts due to any significant differences among the Indonesian people, for example, religious, cultural, or political differences? Did economic differences trigger the conflict? Why was the Indonesian government unable to identify the early symptoms of the conflict? What constraints or barriers does the government face in preventing further eruptions of conflict, so that they do not occur in the future?

## B. CHRONOLOGY OF THE CONFLICTS

The first outburst of violence in Maluku occurred in 1950 when Dr. Somoukil, supported by some dissatisfied officers of the former Dutch colonial army, declared

independence for the South Moluccan Republic (Republik Maluku Selatan-RMS). All of the RMS members were from the majority Christian Ambonese community and had worked for the Dutch during the colonialization period. They refused to let Maluku become part of the Unitary State of Indonesia. Subsequently, the Indonesian government under president Soekarno rejected this new state and sent in troops to crack down on the South Moluccan Republican movement. After a few months of conflict against the Indonesian National Army, the secessionist movement was defeated.<sup>20</sup> During the following decades, this rich region became a relatively peaceful state.

In 1999, violence erupted again in what can be viewed as a tremendous religious communal conflict in Indonesia. Before then, Maluku was a relatively peaceful province under President Soeharto's administration. The deadly conflict that started in 1999 continued without ceasing until 2004. Fortunately, since 2004, there has been no reoccurrence of the horrible conflict of the past; however, sporadic tension and conflicts are still ongoing in the Maluku archipelago. For instance, roadside bombings, communal clashes, and random shootings of people continue. In the following section, I will describe the chronology of conflict in Maluku to show why the conflict continued without ceasing for several years.

In general, the conflict can be divided into three phases: the first phase, from January to April 1999; the second phase, from July to December 1999; and the third phase, from April 2000 to 2004.<sup>21</sup>

### **1. Phase One: January to April 1999**

The initial phase of the conflict erupted on January 19, 1999 and continued until the end of April 1999, when the Moslem community in Ambon prepared to celebrate *Hari Raya Idul Fitri*, a holy day for Moslems throughout the world. Before that, at the end of 1998 certain scattered occurrences of violence, such as the conflict in Wailete on December 13, 1998, in Air Bak on December 27, 1998, and in Batu Gantung Waringin on January 5, 1999, had erupted in Ambon.<sup>22</sup> However, the violence did not spread

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<sup>20</sup> Jacques Bertrand. *Nationalism*, op. cit., pp. 115-116.

<sup>21</sup> Lambang Trijono. "Religious Communal Conflict and Multi-Track Resolution: Lesson from Ambon, Indonesia." Center for Security and Peace Studies, Gadjah University. <<http://www.cspsggm.or.id/artikel/Pus001LT.htm>> (accessed April 9, 2005), p. 5.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

widely in Maluku and was successfully contained in the local areas. Those earlier outbreaks were also mild in comparison to that of January 19, 1999, which “initiated the eruption of a sequence of conflicts”<sup>23</sup> that have continued up to 2004.

The first deadly conflict that began on January 19, 1999 was triggered by a dispute between two youth groups in Ambon city, one from the Christian village of Batu Merah, the other from a Moslem village, Mardika.<sup>24</sup> The conflict apparently stemmed from an individual dispute over minibus fares. In way of explaining the initial conflict, we need to look at the two versions of the conflict that spread among Christian and Moslem communities before the conflict dramatically escalated. The first version accounts for the conflict derived from the Christian community and the second one was the version from the Moslem community. Both versions had their own way to disperse widely to the entire region and eventually triggered the conflict that erupted on 19 January 1999.<sup>25</sup>

According to the Christian version, around 2:30 p.m. on January 19, two Moslem youths from Merdika, named Salim and Usman approached a Christian youth from Batu Merah, named Yopi. Yopi was a driver of a public transport van at the Batu Merah terminal and had just started his shift. The two Moslem youths<sup>26</sup> demanded Rp 500 (equal to U.S. fifty cents) from Yopi, which he refused to pay, because he just started his shift and had no money yet. After his first trip, about half an hour, to Mardika terminal, Yopi returned to the Batu Merah terminal with no passengers on board. He found the Moslem youths still there, waiting for the money. He told them he had no money yet and asked them to stop their demands. Suddenly, one of them took out his Badik, a traditional knife and pointed it at Yopi’s neck. After a brief scuffle, Yopi was able to get away and drove the van again to Mardika, hoping Salim and Usman would leave. He was wrong; when he returned again to Batu Merah terminal, the youths again asked him for money. Salim took

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<sup>23</sup> Trijono, Lambang. “Religious Communal Conflict,” op. cit., pp. 5-6.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Human Right Watch. “Indonesia: The Violence in Maluku.” Report on Violence in Ambon. March 1999, Vol. 11, No. 1 (C). <<http://www.fica.org/hr/ambon/idMaluku-HRW.html>> (accessed April 9, 2005), p. 11.

out his knife and ran after Yopi.<sup>27</sup> This version of the dispute eventually ended with a conflict between the Moslem Salim and the Christian Yopi. Such situations were common in Maluku, and disputes among youth groups or gangs were usually contained and settled peacefully through religious leaders talking to those involved. Peace was then ensured by the police.

The Moslem version of the dispute stated that Yopi, the van driver, had a Moslem helper, from Batu Merah Dalam and that the van belonged to a Moslem Bugis tribal migrant, also from Batu Merah Dalam. On January 19, 1999, the van had been individually hired or rented. But Yopi refused to give some money from what he had received from renting the van to the conductor, who asked for the money on behalf of the van's owner. In addition to his refusal to pay any money, Yopi who was accompanied by other passengers identified as Christians, was said to have threatened and attacked the conductor, who ran away, seeking reinforcement from his friends in Batu Merah Dalam to retaliate against Yopi. Eventually, that dispute led to a confrontation between two large groups from the two villages, which degenerated quickly into a large-scale ethnic conflict in Maluku.<sup>28</sup>

Both versions of the initial dispute spread among the Moslems, both migrants and indigenous, and among the Christian Ambonese in Ambon City. This conflict eventually spread to other islands around Maluku, with both sides blaming the other for provoking the conflict. A Human Rights Watch investigation in Maluku summarizes the two versions in this way:

One, circulated by the legal team representing Christian detainees, portrays a Christian Ambonese public transport driver, Jacob Leuhery, otherwise known as Yopi, as the victim of harassment by two Bugis Muslims, Usman and Salim. A second version, circulated by the fact-finding team of the Moluccan branch of a Muslim political party, the Justice Party, portrays the Bugis as the victims of intimidation by Yopi.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Human Right Watch. "Indonesia: The Violence in Maluku." op. cit., p. 11.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

Yopi was finally arrested by police on charges of lashing out at the Bugis youth. However, when interviewed by a Human Rights Watch Team in Ambon, Yopi held to his own version of how the dispute occurred.<sup>30</sup>

Following that episode, conflicts in Ambon worsened, especially after several mosques and churches were burned to the ground by the opposing sides. The conflict at that time had not only erupted in Ambon but had also spread rapidly to the village of Hila, several dozen kilometers from Ambon. Meanwhile, in Ambon itself, the violence reached a peak in such places as Batu Gantung, Waringin, Benteng Karang, Passo, Nania, Wailete, Hative Besar and other locales. After a few days of initial outbreak, the people quickly divided along the lines of the two major religious groups, the Ambonese Christians and the Ambonese Moslems, who were allied with Moslem migrants, that is, Buton, Bugis, and Makasar migrants (the BBM). They two groups, Moslem and Christian, attacked each other. On the one hand, Christians deliberately assaulted and burned down Moslems migrant's properties, such as markets and shops where the Moslem-Butonese and Bugis were mostly concentrated. They skipped Chinese properties, however, because the majority of them are Christians. On the other hand, Moslems attacked and also burned down some Christian villages. As a result several mosques and churches were reportedly burned to the ground, and some cars, motorbikes, and buildings were also destroyed. In addition, it was estimated that several people from both sides had died in Ambon, and thus city-wide destruction was apparently inevitable.<sup>31</sup>

On February 3, 1999, as the deadly conflict in Ambon spread to neighboring islands in Central Maluku. Christians equipped with sharp weapons attacked Moslems who had been invited to the preceding peaceful talks held in Kairatu, on Seram Island. In return, Moslems burned down Christian-owned houses in the village of Waisatu. Similarly, on Saparua Island, Christians and Moslems assaulted each other, which, in turn, led to mass mobilization on both sides. However, that confrontation was resolved through religious leaders' efforts to calm down their people and contain the conflict. On February 14, 1999, a clash between Moslems from the hamlet of Pelau and Christians

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<sup>30</sup> Human Right Watch. "Indonesia: The Violence in Maluku," op. cit., p. 11.

<sup>31</sup> Jacques Bertrand. "Legacies of the Authoritarian Past: Religious Violence in Indonesia's Molluccan Islands." *Pacific Affairs*. (Spring 2002), p. 75.

from Kariu, a neighboring village, erupted on Haruku, and approximately twenty-three people died altogether, from both sides. This conflict did not only involve Moslems and Christians from both Pelau and Kariu, but also Butonese and Ambonese Moslems from other places, who flew into the conflict areas to help the Moslems from Pelau. After the conflict's escalation began to decreased, both sides accused security force members of siding with either the Moslem side or the Christian side during the conflict. For the first time, people in Maluku denounced the Indonesian security forces as biased in settling the conflict in Maluku.<sup>32</sup>

After things had quieted down for about a month, people in Ambon began to fear the possibility of a renewed conflict. Their fear continued, due to ongoing violence around Ambon, in Haruku for example, and, indeed, was worsened by limited security guarantees from the military and the police. Scattered, small confrontations between Christians and Moslems, such as the communal clashes among people in Waai (Christians), Tulehu (Moslems), and Liang (Moslems), and the attack by a small group on a couple of houses, including the house of Abdullah Soulina, the head of Al Fatah Mosque Foundation, were robust signs that conflict in Ambon might soon reach a peak. During the first week of March, Ambon became a “war zone” between Moslems from the village of Rinjani and Christians from the Ahuru quarter. Thirteen people were claimed to have been killed, and nine were wounded in the course of the clashes, due to police firing live ammunition into the crowd. Again, contradictory statements from both Christians and Moslems remained unresolved regarding the initial perpetrator who attacked either a mosque or in the Christian quarter in Ambon. Another incident, an attack on a nearby Silo church in Ambon City on March 6, 1999, also increased the tension within the community, which now, stood divided along a religious and ethnic dividing line. Both sides began erecting roadblocks and armed themselves with sharp weapons and rifles to prevent the other side from attacking. Religious leaders in Ambon and Maluku could not prevent the people from attacking each other once again and hence, the conflict spread all over Ambon, until April 1999, mostly because the Indonesian security forces could not contain it.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Jacques Bertrand. “Legacies,” op. cit., p. 77.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 78.

## **2. Phase Two: July to December 1999**

A second large-scale phase of violence in Ambon erupted in early July of 1999 when a Poka estate inhabited by multiethnic and multireligious populations was burned down by an unidentified group of people. The incident resulted in a confrontation between Christians and Moslems who viewed one another as the initial perpetrators of the conflict. Most of the shops and markets that were located on the border between the two factions, which became known as “Gaza Strip,” were burned, causing economic activities to cease completely in Ambon. This conflict involved more people from both the Christian and the Moslem communities than ever before. Despite the start of this new conflict, Ambon quieted down for almost two months, and eventually reached a low point that permitted economic activities to increase gradually.<sup>34</sup>

Nonetheless, the incidents at Ambon’s Silo Church and An-Nur Mosque in “Gaza Strip” profoundly affected people’s lives. Memories of those incidents remained deep in people’s minds, renewing their hatred of the other side. The situation deteriorated even further when word spread in Ambon that Moslems were planning to take revenge against Christians. On the other hand, Christians heard rumors that there would be massive violence during December of 1999 when both Moslems and Christians celebrate holy days—Idul Fitri for Moslems and Christmas for Christians. The rumors circulated among the Christians were believed because the conflict in January 1999 had erupted on the last day of Ramadhan, when Moslems celebrated Idul Fitri. Similarly, the more recent conflict, spread rapidly all over Ambon and to the surrounding islands: because it could not be contained and stopped by the local police and military forces. Moreover, people believed that it had been initiated by previous conflicts in North Maluku, Seram, Buru, Haruku, and Saparua, leading people on both sides to perceive the other as a most threatening enemy. By October 1999, the second conflict had extended to all of North Maluku, Ternate, Tidore, and Halmahera. It continued for almost six months, from July to December, 1999, longer than the first one. As a result, many people were displaced and tension remained high throughout Ambon.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Lambang Trijono. “Religious Communal Conflict,” op. cit., p. 6.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

Rather than religious issues, the second conflict in Ambon and Maluku was triggered by a local issue that centered around the establishment of new territory. According to an account by the sociologist Thamrin Amal Tomagola, an expert on the Molluccan region, this conflict erupted right after the government issued a regulation indicating the creation of a new district, Malifut, in August 1999. The majority population in Malifut, located along the border between North and Central Halmahera, are Moslems. Thus people around this new district, who were Christians, disagree with the government's decision to create the new district. According to the surrounding Christian, creating a new district, would cause them to lose control of that territorial area, and the spread of Christianity to Central Halmahera would be hindered. In protest of government's decision, Christians initiated an assault on the Malifut district, which was inhabited by Makianese who had been relocated to Malifut in 1975 due to the threat of a potential volcanic eruption in their native location.<sup>36</sup>

By the time the second conflict ended, casualties on both sides had mounted. In November 1999, it was believed that twenty people had died during a series of confrontations in the cities of Tidore and Ternate. Furthermore, approximately 907 altogether, from both sides, lost their lives between December 26 and early January, 2000, when deadly attacks occurred in North Halmahera, Tobelo, Galela, and Jailolo, where Christians are in the majority.<sup>37</sup> In all, during the communal religious conflict in 1999, at least 1,500 people were thought to have died while later statistical data suggests the toll may have been as high as 4,000.<sup>38</sup> Eventually, due to the intense communal religious conflict in Molucca that erupted throughout 1999, the Indonesian government decided to send more troops and police into that tense area. Their main tasks were to prevent future outbreaks and disperse the fighting and gang ferocity throughout Molucca. In November 1999, the government also considered announcing "a state of civil

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<sup>36</sup> Jacques Bertrand. *Nationalism*, op. cit., pp. 129-130.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 129.

<sup>38</sup> Armed Conflict Report. "Indonesia-Molucca," op. cit., p. 5.

emergency” in Ambon in order to prevent military forces and police from taking sides in the conflict, which people from both sides, Moslems and Christians, claimed that the military and police were doing.<sup>39</sup>

### **3. Phase Three: April 2000 to 2004**

The Indonesian government’s decision near the end of 1999 to send more troops and police as reinforcements for local security forces resulted in the de-escalation of the conflict in Maluku. Ambon was relatively peaceful from January to April of 2000. Those temporary peaceful conditions, if they can be called that, were more superficial than it appeared, leading people to have a false sense of security. Mutual trust and reconciliation among the people of Maluku was still not achieved. However, sending more troops and police to Ambon to deter both sides, Christian and Moslem, from initiating future conflicts proved effective.<sup>40</sup> Nonetheless, Maluku remained fragile, even though social and economic activities were gradually resumed during January to April 2000.

The cooling-off period in Maluku once again lasted only a short time however. By April 2000, large religious communal conflicts broke out again many times. Several Moslems and Christians lost their lives, and four Christian youths were seized and held in Moslems strongholds. Many people consider the April 2000 conflict as the culmination of the entire bloody conflict since the first eruption in January 1999. There are many explanations for the third phase of the conflict, but the dispute at *becak* (tricycle) rally between Moslems and Christian youths passing by the Moslem village of Waihaong on their way to celebrate a “peace” fete was what most people thought triggered the conflict. Furthermore there were two possible explanations why the *becak* rally dispute may have stirred up new confrontations. First, the tricycle rally passed through Moslem Waihaong at sundown, the time when most Moslems offer their evening prayers. So, they considered this offensive and religiously impolite behavior. Second, for Moslems, a *becak* was a sensitive occasion: its primarily purpose was to earn money. Furthermore, it reminded Moslems of the initial conflict in January 1999, when Moslems lost most of their *becak* because of the conflict. Subsequently, they thought that the Christians had, in

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<sup>39</sup> Armed Conflict Report. “Indonesia-Molucca,” op. cit., p. 4.

<sup>40</sup> Lambang Trijono. “Religious Communal Conflict,” op. cit., p. 7.

effect, stolen their *becaks* during the first conflict. Since then, tensions between Moslems and Christians have heightened and tend to return the people in Ambon to massive clashes.<sup>41</sup>

The third phase of conflict in Maluku differed from the first and second phases. According to both Moslems and Christians, the involvement of external forces, the local radical religious leaders and military and police members who allegedly took sides in the conflict, became more salient. Furthermore, the central issues in the ongoing bloody conflict in Maluku were broadcast all over the country. Hence more people started paying more attention to supporting a particular religious group or urged the government to implement overall reconciliation in Maluku. The main issues were the deaths of five hundred Moslems and the forcing of another 10,000 people to become refugees as a result of the deadly battle between Moslems and Christians in December 1999 in the northern part of Halmahera Island. Coupled with an incident in which several hundred Moslems were forced to convert to Christianity in North Maluku, this encouraged external forces, such as Laskar Jihad (Jihad Warriors) and Laskar Mujahiddin from Java to send members to help the Moslem people in Maluku.<sup>42</sup> At the same time, in North, Maluku and Maluku in 2000, thousands of Christians were impelled to convert to Islam. The intensifying activities of Laskar Jihad in confronting the Christian community triggered indigenous Christian Ambonese in December 2000 to form the Maluku Sovereignty Forum (FKM)<sup>43</sup> in order to fight against Laskar Jihad and the whole Moslem population. In the meantime, both retired and active military and police members allegedly provided military training for both sides and helped them to fight against each other. These new dynamics eventually intensified the conflict. As a result, Ambon became a city of war for Christians and Moslems, where weapons, explosives, hand-made weapons, and other deadly weapons were easily distributed between opposing groups.

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<sup>41</sup> Lambang Trijono. "Religious Communal Conflict," op. cit., p. 7.

<sup>42</sup> "Maluku," op. cit., p. 3.

<sup>43</sup> International Crisis Group. "Indonesia: Violence Erupts Again in Ambon." In ICG Asia Briefing, May 17, 2004, p. 2.

This situation, in which many more factions on both sides were getting involved, it only made the violence more intense than ever before in Maluku. Moreover, in addition to the open conflict between Moslems and Christians, during the third phase, cases of sniping increased dramatically in Maluku. Relatively minor incidents, such as the shooting of a prominent political sub-district leader from the Islamic Political Party (PKS), Abdullah Daeng Matta, on April 26, 2000; the sniper murder of two members of the mobile brigade (an elite police unit) on April 27, 2000; and another sniper killing of two Moslem youths in the village of Waringin on April 28, 2000, were all signs of the uncertain security circumstances in Maluku due to the deadly intense conflict. The presence of snipers also proved people's accusation of alleged military and police involvement in the conflict. Within a single week in April 2000, sniper attacks killed more than thirty people, twenty-two of whom were Moslems.<sup>44</sup> Even though police and military forces found and captured several snipers, snipers continued to threaten and kill both civilians and security force members in Maluku. However, after 2000, Maluku calmed down.

In this section, I will summarize the rest of the Maluku conflict chronology ending with the year 2004. In 2001, the conflict was contained and the number of incidents decreased, though sporadic communal clashes between Moslems and Christians still occurred. The number of deaths due to the conflict also decreased, reaching the lowest number ever. Unfortunately, a final peace during 2001 was unattainable because the Moslems refused to join in peace talks with the Christians and threatened the moderate Moslems who wanted to end the conflict.<sup>45</sup>

In February of 2002, peace in Maluku province between Christians and Moslems was within sight. A peace agreement brought about more peaceful conditions than in the previous year. However after a few months, the peace agreement was no longer working, since Laskar Jihad had launched an attack against Christians in Ambon.<sup>46</sup> In the following year, conditions in Maluku were little different than the previous year. Nonetheless, security conditions were getting much better, and there were no signs of conflict in

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<sup>44</sup> International Crisis Group. "Indonesia: Violence Erupts Again in Ambon." op. cit., pp. 3-4.

<sup>45</sup> Armed Conflict Report. "Indonesia-Molucca," op. cit., p. 1.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

Maluku throughout 2003. The internally displaced persons (IDP), however, who had been living in refugee camps all over the province remained there<sup>47</sup> and were still confronted by traumatic conflict.

In April 2004, ethnic conflict in Maluku broke out again. And this time, the clash between Moslems and Christians was followed by arson and bombings that resulted in at least forty deaths. Although tension between Christians and Moslems remained high for the next few months, no major conflict was reported. The issue of the internally displaced persons, however, remained a major problem for local governments. Approximately 200,000 IDP who were in refugee camps desperately wanted to repatriate.<sup>48</sup> From late 2004 onward, Maluku has remained peaceful. The Indonesia Armed Forces and Police have control over security, martial law and curfews have been lifted and authority has been restored to civilians. Nonetheless, scattered minor conflicts among the people of Maluku are still ongoing, and Moslems and Christians still maintain live within a dividing line. This kind of societal segregation forces military and police members to set up bases in the middle as a neutral zone,<sup>49</sup> giving people a way to interact without security concerns.

### C. THE UNDERLYING FACTORS OF ETHNIC CONFLICT

The previous section explained how conflict initially occurred in Ambon, the capital of Maluku province, in early 1999 and how it subsequently spread to other regions. In this section, I will explore the underlying factors in 1998 that made Maluku especially susceptible to ethnic conflict.

By “underlying factors,” as used here I mean the nature of the disputes and differences among the people in Maluku that arguably led to the conflict. This discussion of underlying factors will deal with political disputes, economic/social tensions, religious differences, cultural differences, and tribal disputes among the people of Maluku. These factors, which had greatly increased societal tension in Maluku for years before the

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<sup>47</sup> Armed Conflict Report. “Indonesia-Molucca,” op. cit., p. 1.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Gerry Van Klinken. “The Maluku Wars of 1999: Bringing Society Back In.” <[file:///F:/The Maluku wars of 1999.htm](file:///F:/The%20Maluku%20wars%20of%201999.htm)> (accessed May 2, 2000).

eventual outbreak of conflict, I argue, were the causes of the bloody ethnic confrontations in Maluku. I will begin by looking at these underlying factors from a political perspective.

### **1. Political Disputes**

Many people in Indonesia contend that the collapse of President Soeharto's administration in 1998 was one of the main causes of ethnic conflict in Indonesia, particularly in Maluku. This is mainly because the Soeharto regime's collapse led to political chaos in almost all parts the country. Thus, in the case of the Maluku conflict, most Indonesia politicians believed that it was a political conflict between elites who were pro the status quo and who used religion as a vehicle to challenge the incumbent government and the elites who wanted Indonesia to move toward becoming a more democratic country. This argument is supported by the fact that some Indonesian leaders, such as Gus Dur (Abdurrahman Wahid), the former President, also declared that conflict in Maluku was not religious, but rather, political. In addition, Megawati, the Vice President, Amien Rais, The Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, and Akbar Tanjung, The Speaker of the House of Representatives all also emphasized that the conflict in Maluku was a political conflict that involved some political elites in Jakarta.<sup>50</sup>

Some argue that political conflict in Maluku was conducted by particular political elites and military officers who lost influence and power when President Gus Dur was elected. They pursued their political agendas by provoking conflict in an effort to undermine and destabilize the government under Gus Dur's leadership.<sup>51</sup> The argument regarding the involvement of civilians and the military with links to former Indonesian President Soeharto were further supported by the Indonesian Defense Minister, Juwono Sudarsono.<sup>52</sup> However such arguments have never been proven, due to a lack of evidence, and the alleged provocateurs were never arrested.

To better understand how political tensions in Indonesia in general and in Maluku in particular led to the ethnic conflict of 1999, it is useful to look briefly at Indonesian

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<sup>50</sup> Trijono, Lambang. "Religious Communal Conflict," op. cit., p. 8.

<sup>51</sup> International Crisis Group. "Indonesia: Overcoming Murder and Chaos in Maluku." In ICG Asia Report No. 10. December 19, 2000, p. iii.

<sup>52</sup> International Crisis Group. "Indonesia's Maluku Crisis: the Issues." In ICG Indonesia Briefing Paper. July 19, 2000, p. 4.

history. During the Dutch colonialization period in Maluku, from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries, the Dutch granted their favor to the Ambonese Christians, proving better education for them and recruiting them as administrators in the Dutch company. Ambonese Christians who lacked a higher education were often provided jobs in the Dutch Army, the KNIL, and eventually became the majority group in the Army at that time. The Dutch political discrimination marginalized the Ambonese Moslems in the state bureaucratic system and isolated them from Dutch institutions. And the Ambonese Moslems, who lived mostly in the countryside, had little contact with the Ambonese Christians.<sup>53</sup> Some historians believe that it was the Dutch political favoritism was the genesis of tension among the Ambonese in terms of their political disputes.

During the Japanese occupation from 1942 to 1945, Japan also created an underlying tension but in reverse. The Japanese favored the Ambonese Moslems and appointed them to serve on the staffs of their institutions, which resulted in the displacement of large numbers of Ambonese Christians from bureaucratic and military positions. In addition, Japan provided education and military training for Ambonese Moslems, to enhance their ability in staffing institutions and running the Japanese military base in Maluku. There was little explanation at the time why Japan favored Moslems over Christians. Looking back, one explanation of the Japanese political, administrative policy could be that it was part of Japan's general divide-and-conquer policy, typically used by colonialist to weaken indigenous people. Again, the Ambonese population experienced tension created by political disputes that were the result of colonial policies.

Even after Indonesia gained its independence in 1945, these tensions among the populace due to political disputes in Ambon continued to exist. At the time, the disputes involved two basic groups: those who wanted Maluku to be part of the unitary State of Indonesia proclaimed by President Soekarno, and those who opposed joining the unitary state. Around 1950, therefore, a secessionist movement occurred, and the government in Maluku called the area the Republic of South Molucca (RMS). Most government members were Ambonese Christians, the majority of whom rallied for the former Dutch

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<sup>53</sup> Jacques Bertrand. *Nationalism*, op. cit., p. 115.

Army, KNIL (Koninklijk Nederlandsch-Indisch Leger, or Royal Dutch East Indies Army). They viewed the current unitary state of Indonesia as a Moslem-majority country and feared that Christians would lose their political leverage in the future. President Soekarno rejected the secessionist movement and sent troops to Maluku to crush the newly created Republic. In 1963, the RMS's actions were significantly reduced and many RMS members fled to the Netherlands, and where they created a government in exile.<sup>54</sup>

In 1965, President Soeharto came to power, right after an abortive coup conducted by the Indonesian Communist Party. During the 1970s and 1980s, President Soeharto achieved tremendous economic development, even though his political policies were deemed repressive, marginalizing Moslem political expression within state institutions all over the country. Had tensions not increased among those at the state level and had President Soeharto not favored a particular group of people, the conflict between Moslems and Christians may not have been rekindled. In the 1990s, for the first time, Soeharto created a policy that favored Moslems and was intended to gain their support in the next election. For instance, he appointed the first Moslem, Saleh Latuconsina as Maluku governor. After that, the political composition in Maluku began to change and many Christians were replaced by Moslems in regional state institutions as well. But during 1999, in contrast to President Soeharto's policy, President Megawati, through her political party, the Indonesian Democratic Party-Struggle (PDI-P), restored the Ambonese Christian political domination in Maluku. Her party, which consisted mostly of Ambonese Christians, won the general election and made her the fourth Indonesian president, replacing President Wahid.<sup>55</sup>

I believe that conflict in Maluku cannot be separated from the political issues that I have traced, all the way back to the colonial period. Every time a regime collapsed in Indonesia, the tension among the people increased significantly, particularly in Maluku. Each time, conflicts broke out and led to an eruption of ethnic conflict between the Ambonese Christians and the Ambonese Moslems. This argument is supported by Michael Brown's writings, which note that a "weak state" is a starting point for analyzing

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<sup>54</sup> Jacques Bertrand. *Nationalism*, op. cit., pp. 115-116.

<sup>55</sup> International Crisis Group. "Indonesia: Memburu Perdamaian," op. cit., p. 2.

ethnic conflict.<sup>56</sup> In his article, “The Challenges of Managing International Conflict,” political disputes are the main issues he discusses. Brown argues that a lack of political legitimacy and state’s inability to deal with their internal affairs will result in weak states and eventually lead to the breaking out of ethnic conflict. This condition of a weak state, as portrayed by Brown, parallels the political conditions that existed within Indonesia before the bloody ethnic conflict in Maluku finally erupted in early 1999. It is clear that political disputes either at the state level or the regional level have increased tensions among the populace in Maluku who wanted to have more direct access to political leverage. As a result, in the case of Maluku, the ensuing ethnic conflict was inevitable.

## **2. Economic and Social Disparities**

During the 1970s and 1980s, Maluku faced a mass influx of migrants from other provinces. Most were from Bali, Java, Madura, and Sulawesi. It is estimated that approximately one-third of the Ambonese populations during the 1990s were migrants.<sup>57</sup> Then, ensuing economic tension due to the changing societal composition in Maluku began to mount among the people. In addition, the economic crisis that hit Indonesia in 1997 seriously worsened the Indonesian economy. Some people in Indonesia argue that the prolonged economic crisis after 1997 led to economic disputes and further provoked the ethnic conflict in Maluku. The basis for this argument is explained by Brown in an article about states’ internal ethnic conflicts. He points out that ethnic conflict may occur in a state due to diverse economic/social factors: “economic problems, discriminatory economic systems, and the trials and tribulations of economic development and modernization.”<sup>58</sup> Generally speaking, the argument about economic/social factors can also be applied to Indonesia.

To begin, this section will focus on the desperate economic situation that Indonesia has faced since 1997. Though it is impossible to tell whether Indonesia experienced economic stagnation or not, the country’s devaluation of its currency rate in 1999 essentially proved that Indonesia was facing a severe economic problem at that time. The exchange rate for the Indonesian rupiah dramatically dropped from around Rp

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<sup>56</sup> Michael Brown. “The Challenges of Managing International Conflict.” Eds. Chester A. Crocker, Fen Osler Hampson, and Pamela Aall. Washington: United State Institute of Peace Press, 2001, p. 214.

<sup>57</sup> International Crisis Group. “Indonesia: Memburu Perdamaian,” op. cit., p. 1.

<sup>58</sup> Michael Brown. “The Challenges,” op. cit., p. 217.

2,500.00 for one U.S. dollar in 1996 to around Rp 17,000 in 1999. The situation apparently created economic tension among Indonesians. Furthermore, in Maluku, the change in the societal composition due to the mass influx of migrants created additional economic tensions between the newcomers and the indigenous people. As Bartels says in his 1977 Ph.D. dissertation, “Guarding the Invisible Mountain: Intervillage Alliances, Religious Syncretism and Ethnic Identity among Ambonese Christians and Moslems in the Moluccas,” prolonged conflict between migrants and indigenous Ambonese is caused by people’s struggle for “scarcer resources of village-land.”<sup>59</sup> In addition, migrants in Maluku—commonly known as Bugese, Butonese, and Makassar (BBM)—also held positions dominating regional economic aspects such as staple retails, public transports, and other economic activities in Maluku. The indigenous people saw migrants as a threat, because they were overwhelming them in their own land.<sup>60</sup> Finally, competition for scarce resources between indigenous people and migrants spawned renewed ethnic conflict in Maluku.<sup>61</sup>

Second, a discriminatory economic system within a state may result in internal ethnic conflict. When people start looking at economic growth as an illegitimate possession and as inequality, the outcome of such a discriminatory economic system can be extensive. This is what Jon Goss refers to in his article “Understanding the ‘Maluku Wars.’” According to Gross, writing about that earlier period, “economic resources are distributed unequally between the two respective segments (in this case indigenous Christians Ambonese and Moslem migrants)”<sup>62</sup> This can cause sectarian conflict to occur, as it has in Maluku. In addition, the creation of a new district, Malifut, in Maluku in August 1999 by the central government may explain how a discriminatory economic system came to be in Maluku. Malifut is a Moslem district overall, but, it contains a number of preponderantly Christian Kao and Pagu villages. Thus, according to the indigenous people, this new district is providing newcomers with subsidies and is

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<sup>59</sup> Deiter Bartles. “Guarding the Invisible Mountain: Intervillage Alliances, Religious Syncretism and Ethnic Identity among Ambonese Christians and Moslems in the Moluccas.” Ph.D. Diss., Cornell University, 1977

<sup>60</sup> International Crisis Group. “Indonesia: Memburu Perdamaian,” op. cit., p. 2.

<sup>61</sup> Michael Brown. “The Challenges,” op. cit., p. 217.

<sup>62</sup> Jon Goss. “Understanding the ‘Maluku Wars’: An Overview of the Sources of Communal Conflict and Prospects for Peace.” *Cakalele* Vol. 11-12, 2004, p. 5.

creating a new district that has the potential for being a lucrative goldmine for migrants, because the central government has a policy that shows favoritism toward Moslem migrants.<sup>63</sup> Nevertheless, the indigenous people's perception of the central government's policies is not always accurate. Further evidence is needed to prove such accusations of the central government's favoritism, although in the Malifut case, they may be true.

A final factor that contributes to current social/economic problems is economic development and modernization, which have substantially affected people's lives in Maluku. The development of technology in transportation significantly increased the number of migrants in Maluku during the period from the 1970s to 1980s, while, at the same time, communication technology provided people with easier access to various media for various purposes. Providing a better education for migrants is another implication that technology is advancing. All these factors, coupled with the economic crisis during the 1990s, particularly in Maluku, have increased tension between the indigenous people and the migrants in terms of economics. This tension is mainly due to migrant achievements and competition with the indigenous people. The ongoing economic tension, whether people realize it or not, has created the grounds for further ethnic conflict in Maluku. And the large number of unemployed youth, the omnipresence of hoodlums, and the social disorder<sup>64</sup> due to this continued economic crisis could also spark further ethnic conflict at any time. Therefore, the government needs to take steps to improve the situation there for everyone.

### **3. Religious Differences**

Nobody denies that ethnic conflict in Maluku eventually became a communal religious conflict. Although the conflict resulted initially from a confrontation between an Ambonese Christian and a Moslem migrant, it rapidly turned into religious conflict after the burning of several mosques and churches. Eventually, indigenous Moslems also got involved, joining the Moslem migrants in fighting against the Ambonese Christians.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Jon Goss. "Understanding," op. cit., p. 5.

<sup>64</sup> Lambang Trijono. "Religious Communal Conflict," op. cit., p. 5.

<sup>65</sup> International Crisis Group. "Indonesia: Memburu Perdamaian," op. cit., p. 2.

Thus, although religion did not play a major role in starting the Maluku conflict, once it began, people used the religious issues to provoke others as much as possible to engage in the conflict.

Some people believe that religious tension between Christians and Moslems in Maluku is a carryover from their colonial legacy; others perceive the tension as a result of President Soeharto's policy of favoritism toward Moslems during the 1990s. Bertrand and Hefner, in the article of "Patterns of Collective Violence in Indonesia," support the latter argument, stating that the rise of Moslem leverage in the political arena within regional and local governments in the 1990s started creating religious tension in Maluku.<sup>66</sup> In contrast, Umar Tuasikal, an Islamic activist based in Java, suggests that the conflict in Maluku is "a continuation of Christian crusades and modern imperialism, part of a historical project to convert Moslems and appropriate their resources."<sup>67</sup> In more radical terms, Rustam Kastor, a Moluccan native, argues that the conflict in Maluku is a conspiracy involving "the RMS (Republik Maluku Selatan, or South Maluku Republic) in the Netherlands, the GPM (Gereja Protestan Maluku, or the Protestant Church of Maluku), and the local Chapter of the 'Christians-Nationalist' PDI-P." He claims that "it is part of a global Jewish-Christian conspiracy against *umat* Islam."<sup>68</sup> The latter two arguments, given by Umar and Kastor, demonstrate clearly that the conflict in Maluku is a conflict between Moslems and Christians.

On the other hand, there are those who believed that the Maluku conflict is not a religious conflict at all. One such proponent is Rev. John Ruhulesi, a Moluccan native, who states that:

We all feel that the root of the conflict is not religion, since we had been living side by side with them (the Moslems)...but there has been a sense that we have been economically marginalized, and an anxiety for external political suppression amongst indigenous Ambonese that are mostly adherents of Christianity...Nevertheless, the social unrest was a blessing in disguise...Following the unrest they (the Christians) became more

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<sup>66</sup> Varshney Ashutosh. et. al., op. cit., p. 29.

<sup>67</sup> Jon Goss. "Understanding the 'Maluku Wars,'" op. cit., p. 14.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

independent in the economic sector, even now many of them unhesitatingly have become becak drivers (three-wheeled vehicles), occupation thus far handled by migrants and Moslems.<sup>69</sup>

In other words, Ruhulesi believes that the conflict in Maluku tends to be a competition between Moslems and Christians over economic issues.

In contrast, another Moluccan native who perceives the Maluku conflict as a religious conflict is cited by Agus Watimmena: "This is a religious war." However, Jon Goss claims that the Maluku conflict is a conflict that involves people who use religion as justification for violence, which is evidence of people's "false consciousness."<sup>70</sup>

The diverse arguments about the Maluku conflict, whether it is a religious conflict or not, continue to prevail in people's minds in Maluku, particularly, since the 1990s when the government started encouraging Moslems to re-engage in political matters. Both religious groups became deeply curious about one another. On the one hand, Moluccan Christians have a heightened fear of what might happen if Moluccan Moslems take control of Maluku. They fear that they will lose their previous domination within all strata of life. On the other hand, Moslems have deemed this chance to gain power as a way for them to catch up with Christians who up until now have marginalized them from having state institution jobs and gaining economic opportunities. Furthermore, the real instance of conflict between Christians and Moslems in Maluku during the 1990s was clearly reflected by the people in power who were struggling for two major positions, that of the Mayor of Ambon and that of the University's Chairman of Pattimura. The struggle was important because it would reveal who would determine future dominance between Christians and Moslems within Maluku society.<sup>71</sup>

Finally, as has been pointed out, the Maluku conflict is not totally a religious conflict. Other factors such as economic disparities and political disputes have caused the conflict to become a religious communal conflict. The presence of religious differences among the Mollucan populace should not cause us to conclude that those differences inevitably trigger conflicts. Many people believe that the religious issues have been

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<sup>69</sup> Lambang Trijono. "Religious Communal Conflict," op. cit., p. 10.

<sup>70</sup> Jon Goss. "Understanding the 'Maluku Wars,'" op. cit., p. 16.

<sup>71</sup> Jacques Bertrand. *Nationalism*, op. cit., pp. 118-119.

politicized and manipulated for the advantage and political agenda of certain groups of people in Maluku. However, the role of religion in preserving people from committing irrational actions, such as humiliation, mutilation, and killing, has failed. This phenomenon reminds us that people need to learn more about their own religion if they are to live side by side peacefully with more tolerance of one another. This may be the most important lesson to be learned from the Maluku conflict that erupted in 1999.

#### **4. Cultural Differences**

The cultural differences among the population in Maluku, even though they have not contributed greatly to the Maluku conflict, are nonetheless of essential importance in this discussion. Brown argues in “The Challenges of Managing International Conflict,” for example, that cultural differences, to a certain extent, will not cause ethnic conflict until “cultural discrimination against minorities”<sup>72</sup> exists within a society and is omnipresent. He points out also that, in many extreme cases, bringing a large number of a particular ethnic group into a minority group’s territory in order to assimilate them culturally can also lead to ethnic conflict.<sup>73</sup> In the case of the Maluku conflict, cultural differences seem to have become more conspicuous since the mass influx of migrants from different provinces dramatically increased in the 1970s and the 1980s. Thus, cultural differences without appropriate understanding by both the indigenous people and the migrants may contribute to ethnic conflict.

Although the cultural differences in Maluku have been very few in numbers, nevertheless, they can generate ethnic conflict such as that which erupted in Hativa Besar village on December 12, 1998. As Betrand notes, at conflict, which broke out between Christian youths and government soldiers at a village dance party, was due to cultural differences. And it was also followed by the destruction of a few communal houses in the village. When Moslem migrants and certain individuals from other areas came to Maluku, they tended not to accept Ambonese Christian values, which included the allowance of ballroom dancing and drinking alcohol, which for Moslems is forbidden. Fortunately, the conflict eventually was settled “through traditional appeals and inter-

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<sup>72</sup> Michael Brown. “The Challenges,” op. cit., p. 218.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 218.

cultural tolerance.”<sup>74</sup> Therefore, we cannot entirely deny that cultural differences among the people in Maluku may provide a breeding ground for ethnic conflict.

### **5. Tribal Disputes**

Lambang Trijono’s article, “Religious Communal Conflict and Multi-Track Resolution: Lesson from Ambon, Indonesia,” describe how conflict in Maluku initially occurred between Ambonese Christians and Moslem migrants commonly known as BBM: Bugese, Butonese, and Makassar tribes. It is now clear that that conflict, which erupted in January 1999, was a tribal dispute between the indigenous people and migrants that was triggered by economic problems. However, during the course of the conflict, the tribal issue was replaced by religious issues, which, in turn, led to a wider conflict. Furthermore some believe that the replacement of tribal issues with religious issues during the next phase of the conflict was an attempt to engage more people in the conflict.<sup>75</sup> Thus, we can say that, to a certain degree, tribal disputes in the Maluku conflict, have indeed contributed to ethnic conflicts, but were not enough to bring more people into the conflict.

Long before ethnic confrontation erupted in Maluku, ethnic tension was an integral part of the social and cultural interaction of the people. Occurrences of prejudice by both nonmigrants (*anak dagang*) and migrants (*anak negeri*) were a common feature of the people’s daily social activities. Moreover, after the initial conflict, both the migrant and the indigenous peoples were given labels that focused more on their religious identity than on their social or ethnic status: Christians were labeled “Red,” or “Obet,” Moslems were called “White,” or “Acang.” The name-labels widened the gap not only between indigenous people and migrants, but also between Ambonese Christians and Ambonese Moslems. Ultimately, the intra and intertribe disputes led to a bloody ethnic conflict in Maluku that caused between 300 and 400 deaths by early 2000, more than half of which occurred over several days in other parts of North Maluku.<sup>76</sup> The death toll had increased to more than 4,000 people by 2004.

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<sup>74</sup> Jacques Bertrand. “Legacies,” op. cit., p. 76.

<sup>75</sup> Lambang Trijono. “Religious Communal Conflict,” op. cit., p. 9.

<sup>76</sup> Gerry Van Klinken. “The Maluku Wars of 1999,” op. cit., p. 1.

How the tribal disputes in Maluku have contributed to a large scale of ethnic conflict is an issue that is thoroughly examined by Donald Rothchild and David A. Lake in their article, “Containing Fear: The origins and Management of Ethnic Conflict” : “When central state authority declines, groups become fearful for their survival. They invest in and prepare for violence, and thereby make actual violence possible.”<sup>77</sup> In regard to the failure of agencies within a state to share information, they argue, “when information failure occurs, groups cannot acquire or share information necessary to bridge the bargaining gap between themselves, making conflict possible.”<sup>78</sup> Furthermore, they find that a “security dilemma” in tribal relations also can lead to ethnic conflict: “When incentives to use force preemptively are strong, a security dilemma takes hold and works its pernicious effects. Fearful that the other might preempt, a group has an incentive to strike first and negotiate later.”<sup>79</sup> These arguments explain clearly how tribal tensions can escalate into tribal disputes and eventually lead to a larger-scale ethnic conflict. Such situations of potential tribal disputes between migrants and indigenous people are precisely what existed in Maluku before the outbreak of ethnic conflict in 1999.

#### **D. THE INDONESIAN GOVERNMENT’S RESPONSES**

During the first phase of the conflict in January of 1999, the central government was accused of not taking serious measures to quell the conflict in Maluku. President B.J. Habibie initially responded by forming a special military team led by Brigadier General Suaidi Marasabesi,<sup>80</sup> which was sent to Maluku to settle the differences among groups. It was effective for a couple of months before the conflict erupted into a larger one. In 1999, President B. J. Habibie was replaced by President Abdurrahman Wahid and during his presidency, Wahid delegated the responsibility to take control over the Maluku conflict to his vice president, Megawati.

President Gus Dur came to power after winning the general election in 1999. One month later, the security conditions in Maluku began to deteriorate. The transitional

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<sup>77</sup> David A. Lake and Donald Rothchild. “Containing Fear,” op. cit., p. 43.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>80</sup> Jacques Bertrand. “Legacies,” op. cit., p. 80.

government under Gus Dur's leadership was not yet strong enough to eliminate or terminate the ethnic conflict. Moreover, the accusation that he was not serious enough in taking fundamental steps toward resolving the conflict later became more vigorous, after December 12, 1999, when he and Vice President Megawati went to Maluku. There, President Gus Dur stated that the Maluku conflict had to be settled by the Moluccans themselves. Thus the central government merely facilitated the reconciliation toward peace and vice president Megawati only asked people to stop fighting each other, because it would lead all sides to suffer themselves.<sup>81</sup> As a result, the government took no significant measures in 1999 to resolve the conflict.

At the beginning of 2000, the Maluku conflict escalated dramatically, and ethnic conflicts resulted in many casualties and damage to a lot of property. At this point, the central government no longer had control over Maluku, which was already devastated by the conflict. However, President Gus Dur still did not want to declare martial law, which many experts had suggested. He did not want to set a new precedent for the military to gain back its power, which had dramatically declined since President Soeharto's resignation. Forced by the escalating conflict, the government's lose of control over the ground troops in Maluku, Gus Dur ultimately declared martial law. Starting on June 26, 2000, he also reinstalled several regional leaders to take control under military supervisors, Saleh Latuconsina, the governor of Maluku, and Abdul Muhyi Effendie, the governor of North Maluku. To establish the notion that the "military was neutral" among the Moluccan people, Gus Dur replaced the former Pattimura military regional commander (KODAM Pattimura), Brigadier General Max Tamaela, a Christians, with Brigadier General I Made Yasa, (a Hindu).<sup>82</sup> The new regulations set up by the central government gave a lot of power to the military and police leaders to take important measures to end the conflict, while leaving it "still under civilian control."<sup>83</sup>

Contrary to practice, but in keeping with the constitutional law established in 1959 regarding imposing martial law, the military commander would have full authority to control the civilian leaders. In the Maluku case, the law could not be either applied or

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<sup>81</sup> International Crisis Group. "Indonesia Memburu Perdamaian," op. cit., p. 8.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

rejected. Thus, the governor, as the local civilian authority directly gave orders and control to the local police to conduct several important measures to halt the conflict: the control of local radio stations, a ban on demonstrations and people's gathering in large groups, the imposition of curfews, and the conducting of the search operations. Unlike the situation in North Maluku, in Maluku province, the establishment of a curfew was followed by a ban on more than ten people gathering for any specific purpose. Furthermore, the local government asked people to hand over all their weapons within thirty days. Nevertheless, notwithstanding martial law, the conflict in Maluku continued, and on July 4, 2000, Pattimura University, the largest university in Maluku was attacked by Moslems who believed that Christians were producing weapons in the university.<sup>84</sup> It soon became clear that national and local leaders needed to enhance their efforts to establish peace.

The imposition of martial law in Maluku and North Maluku was not fully effective in settling the conflict. Although there was a significant reduction in the degree of conflict, several groups of people from outside entered Maluku and the North Maluku Province, and peace was only foreseeable. On January 26, 2002, inspired by the peace agreement between Moslems and Christians in Poso in Central Sulawesi, the government sent two of its ministers, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and Yusuf Kalla, to this hot spot area. Their main task was to call for permanent peace in the Maluku archipelago by conducting peace talks between Moslems and Christians, the same as was done by people in Poso in Central Sulawesi in December 2001. The first peace talks held in Makasar, South Sulawesi, on January 30, 2002, resulted in an agreement to hold a second meeting in February 2002.<sup>85</sup>

Since Yusuf Kalla, the Coordinating Minister for People's Welfare, (Indonesia's current vice president) and Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, Coordinating Minister for Political and Security Affairs, (Indonesia's current President), met with the warring parties in Maluku in February 2002. "A government-sponsored cease-fire" was signed by both sides, Moslems and Christians.<sup>86</sup> The peace accord demanded the creation of two

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<sup>84</sup> International Crisis Group. "Indonesia Memburu Perdamaian," op. cit., p. 9.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>86</sup> Jane's Defense Weekly, June 19, 2002.

joint commissions to deal with security and socio-economic affairs, disarmed both warring sides, and asked “outsiders” such as Laskar Jihad to leave Maluku Province.<sup>87</sup> Although dissenting opinions between Moslems and Christians regarding who had initiated the first conflict in 1999 still existed, even after the peace accord was signed, social and economic conditions in Maluku are now better than in previous years. Following the peace accord, government law enforcement in Maluku was also eradicated and resulted in the seizure of several from both sides, of which more than seventeen activists were from the Maluku Sovereignty Front (FKM), including its leader, Alex Manuputty, who later escaped and now lives in exile in the United States and the leader of Laskar Jihad, Ustadz Jafar Umar Thalib.<sup>88</sup> On September 15, 2003, the Indonesian government lifted martial law, and the police now have full authority to restore and maintain law and order in Maluku and North Maluku.

#### **E. CONCLUSION**

In 1997, Indonesia began experiencing severe economic crises and in 1998, President Soeharto’s administration collapsed and he was replaced by President B.J. Habibie. The transitional government tried to accommodate Indonesian reform demands, which primarily asked the existing government to embrace a more democratic system. After striking changes occurred, on January 19, 1999, Maluku experienced a tremendous ethnic conflict that immediately spread throughout the islands and resulted in the Indonesian Armed Forces and Police losing control. The toll of the conflict on both the Moslem and the Christian sides combined is estimated to be approximately 5,000 people who died and more than 700,000 who were displaced. In short, the combination of the economic crisis in 1997, the collapse of President Suharto’s regime in 1998, and the sudden shift to a more democratic system during the transitional period resulted in political and economic chaos in Indonesia, evidence by several ethnic conflicts, such as that in Maluku.

Among the underlying factors—political disputes, economic and social disparities, religious and cultural differences, and tribal disputes—several political and economic factors outweigh all others in terms of the triggering of the initial disputes in

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<sup>87</sup> Armed Conflict Report. “Indonesia-Molucca,” op. cit., p. 5.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

Maluku. There is a strong correlation between the initial dispute and the escalation of political and economic tension before the large ethnic conflict broke out in 1999. The change in the balance of power in local government, between Moslems and Christians or migrants and local people, and the increase in unemployment after the economic crisis in 1997 particularly, created a tremendous social tension between migrants and indigenous people in Maluku. Hence, other factors such as religious and cultural differences and tribal disputes worked their repercussions in triggering more conflicts.

Once the conflict erupted in 1999, the ethnic conflict quickly spread to other areas around Maluku without being halted by local governments and security forces. The conflict eventually became an open conflict between Moslems and Christians. The escalation of conflict occurred because the Indonesian government failed to settle initial disputes in accordance with existing law, which subsequently created frustration among the people who were fighting. As a result, people lost confidence in the government and, later, before the Malino accord was signed in 2002, hindered any possible government reconciliation efforts. Since then, people in Maluku have lived segregated, according to their ethnicity and religion. Therefore, the conflict in Maluku is considered by many people to have been a religious conflict between Moslems and Christians, rather than an ethnic conflict between migrants and the indigenous people over political and economic power.

### III. ETHNIC CONFLICT IN POSO: WHY DOES PEACE NO LONGER EXIST?

#### PROPINXI SULAWESI

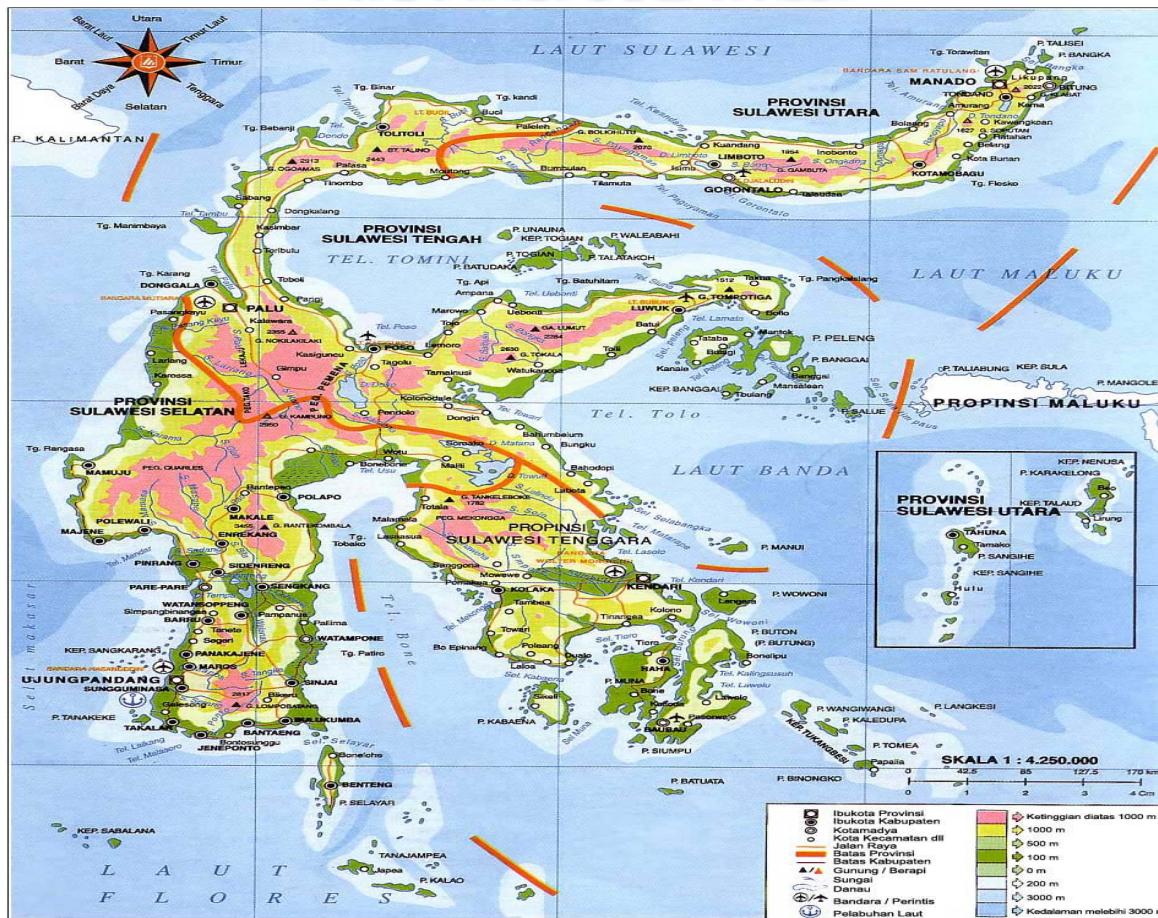


Figure 4. The Map of Sulawesi (From: <[www.pajak-sulselra.go.id/profil.php?id=20](http://www.pajak-sulselra.go.id/profil.php?id=20)> (accessed November 11, 2005))

#### A. INTRODUCTION

Poso is a district in Central Sulawesi province in eastern Indonesia. Its capital city is Poso City, which is located on the gulf, a six-hour drive southeast of Palu, the capital city of Central Sulawesi province.<sup>89</sup> According to demographic data in 1989, Poso covers an area of 28,000 km<sup>2</sup> and has a population of 555,306. In terms of religion, the population in Poso is divided into approximately 400,264 Moslems, 143,249 Protestants,

<sup>89</sup> Human Rights Watch. "Breakdown: Four Years of Communal Violence in Central Sulawesi." In Indonesian Human Rights Report. Vol. 14, No. 9 (C), December 2002.

8,030 Hindus, 2,166 Catholics, and 1,597 Buddhists.<sup>90</sup> The Moslems reside mostly in the cities and inshore villages, while a large part of the indigenous Protestants live in the highlands of the district of Poso.<sup>91</sup> Compared to other districts in Central Sulawesi, Poso is a remote area in which, traditionally, people from different religions and cultural, economic, and educational backgrounds have lived in peace for years.

In addition to being surrounded by natural borders such as beaches and mountainous areas, Poso has administrative borders that are determined by Teluk Tomini and North Sulawesi Province in the north, South Sulawesi Province and Morowali Regency in the south, Banggai Regency and Teluk Tolo Water in the east, and Donggala Regency in the west.<sup>92</sup> Over time, these natural and administrative borders have shifted according to the way the people in Poso have earned their livelihoods. According to the Indonesian Statistical Bureau, people in Poso work in diverse areas: 70.04 percent in agriculture, 10.08 percent in trading, 9.72 percent in public services, 4.53 percent in the industrial sector, 2.31 percent in construction, 1.94 percent in communication, 0.46 percent in mining, 0.11 percent in electricity and water services and 0.42 percent in financial sectors. Poso Regency, in general, produces rattan, cacao, dammar, and kemiri as its nontimber forest products and has hard timber and processed timber as its forest products.<sup>93</sup> In short, due to its natural beauty as well as its products, Poso has been a promised land for many migrants throughout history.

Similar to Maluku, Poso is one of the main target islands that migrants can reach from other destinations around the Indonesian archipelago. Over the past several decades, the Dutch's and Indonesian government's policies toward transmigration programs have changed the structure and composition of the population in Poso. In 1973, President Suharto declared Central Sulawesi as one of ten new transmigration provinces. To support this program he built new migrant settlements and a very dangerous, steep and narrow road called the Trans-Sulawesi Highway. This highway was cut into and through

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<sup>90</sup> "Poso, Enam Tahun Dirundung Duka" (Poso, Six Years in Sorrow). *Tempointeractive*, (May 12, 2004). <[file:///F:/Tempointeractive\\_com-Poso,EnamTahunDirundungDuka.htm](file:///F:/Tempointeractive_com-Poso,EnamTahunDirundungDuka.htm)> (accessed May 31, 2005).

<sup>91</sup> Human Rights Watch. "Breakdown" op. cit., p. 6.

<sup>92</sup> "Who's Behind the Poso, Palu Violence This Time?" *The Jakarta Post*. December 20, 2004, pp. 34-35.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., p. 52.

the rocky and steep mountain forests to ease the path for migrants. As a result, the highway and its settlements have attracted an influx of voluntary migrants, especially Moslem Bugese and Makassar people from South Sulawesi.<sup>94</sup> Since then, Poso Regency has become a place for migrants, coming from both densely and lesser populated areas, such as Java, Madura, Bali, and South Sulawesi.

Before 1998, people in Poso lived peacefully side by side. That harmonious life is best described by the following testimonials from people in Poso. One Poso resident named Benny, now a refugee in Sedoa village, said that “they,” Moslems and Christians “used to live in one big melting pot.” Lebron, the secretary of the Calvary Church congregation in Sangginore, Poso, stated that peace reigned in Poso in the past when religious holidays such as *Idul Fitri*, Christmas, and New Year were celebrated. At such times, he, his family, and his friends would go to Poso City to bring “*Nasi Jaha*,” Glutinous rice cooked in young bamboo leaves, for their Moslem relatives and friends. They celebrated those religious days together by visiting each other. Now, he and his family miss such harmonious circumstances and hope that people in Poso will soon be able to live peacefully side by side as they used to.<sup>95</sup>

In addition to their joint celebration of religious days, two traditional festivals, *Dero* and *Padangku*, also bound people firmly together in Poso. Dero is an art festival during which people—young and old, male and female—hold hands and form a circle while a local tune is played. Dero manifests a popular Poso saying: “Sintuvu Maroso,” which means “united and strong.” It has become a basic principle for people, to resort to deliberations before making a decision. Dero applies not only to the indigenous peoples, but also to migrants such as the Javanese, Balinese, Maduranese and Bugese. Unlike *Dero*, *Padangku* is a customary rite, usually held after harvest time to express gratitude to God for the annual harvest. Traditionally, both festivals involved various religious and ethnic groups in Poso. Having such a diverse traditional culture, Poso was once an area where people had extreme pride in their religious harmony.<sup>96</sup> Since the outbreak of

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<sup>94</sup> Lorraine V. Aragon. “Waiting for Peace in Poso.” Inside Indonesia. April-June 2002, <<http://www.insideindonesia.org/edit70/Poso1.htm>> (accessed May 31, 2005), p. 1.

<sup>95</sup> The Jakarta Post, January 5, 2002.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

ethnic conflict in Poso in 1998, however, this area is no longer a peaceful place for people—especially Moslems and Christians—to live side by side. Now people are segregated along ethnic and religious lines and no longer have traditional festivals that allow different ethnic and religious groups of people to join together. As a result, the Dero performed by the Moslem community is no longer accompanied by Christians, and vice versa.

In general, the Poso conflict reflects a phenomenon similar to what we saw in Maluku. Most people agree that the resignation of President Suharto in 1998 and Indonesia's severe economic crisis in 1997 caused ethnic conflicts to flare up in several regions. The collapse of the Suharto regime significantly reduced Jakarta's power to control the huge Indonesian archipelago both economically and politically. This phenomenon can be best understood by looking at several national conditions that existed from about 1998 onward: the ongoing Indonesian economic crisis (since 1997), the rise of separatist movements, severe social unrest and several deadly ethnic conflicts. Furthermore, the notion of “living in uniformity” that was emphasized by the New Order, rather than the former “unity in diversity,” fueled ethnic conflicts throughout Indonesia. And the condition of uncertainty following the departure of President Suharto has worsened because of economic inequities among the populace. During the ensuing riots and confrontation, grudges against the old regime were expressed by the targeting of government buildings.<sup>97</sup> All of these chaotic circumstances at the national level definitely affected the balance of local political and socio-economic atmospheres within those fragile areas.

Another issue that fueled ethnic tensions in Indonesia after 1998 was a shift in political direction by President Suharto toward Indonesian Moslems, which began in the early 1990s. For example, Bertrand notes that “Islamization” during the last phase of the New Order created ambiguity and anxiety among Christians about their future. The creation of ICMI, which granted a greater role to Moslems, led Indonesia to a critical juncture, as it marginalized Christians from their former positions. However, during the crisis of the New Order’s administration, national politics changed when Moslems started

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<sup>97</sup> Jacques Bertrand. *Nationalism*, op. cit., p. 91.

distancing themselves from President Suharto and raised their voices against the government. They urged the New Order regime to end the existing corruption, to embrace democracy, and to stop making policies that benefited only minority groups instead of the majority of the people in Indonesia.<sup>98</sup> The arguments about state policy toward Moslems that cause ethnic conflict often ignore the facts that, “though many regions are affected by these policies, only some of them produce ethnic conflict.”<sup>99</sup> The ambiguity of the national politics following the collapse of the New Order regime intensified the friction between Moslems and Christians in particular areas, such as Poso and Maluku, where religious hegemony had been embedded in the society for years. Whenever religious issues entered into politics, conflicts were easily escalated between groups that previously had been religiously polarized. Jacques Bertrand’s argument, in *Nationalist and Ethnic Conflict in Indonesia*, cannot fully explain the phenomena of Indonesia’s ethnic conflicts, but he at least provides us with a religious dimension of the conflict that then can be used to explain some of the current ethnic issues.

Poso Regency initially experienced ethnic conflict in December 1998, when bloody clashes erupted between indigenous and Bugis youth. Similar to the Maluku conflict, the violence in Poso quickly spread throughout the region, and the local army and police were unable to control it. The chaotic situation can be best explained by looking at both the national level, as mentioned above, and the local level as well. Underlying religious, socio-economic, and cultural differences, compounded by political competition between Moslems and Christians, eventually led to severe ethnic conflicts. However, religious issues were not an initial underlying factor. It was only after both groups of people politicized the religious issue in the conflict that people in Poso became polarized and began attacking one another. Indeed, Poso conflict was not a religious conflict, as an examination of the local socio-economic and political issues makes clear. For instance, over time, the economic disparities between indigenous and migrant groups, social issues such as alcoholism and political competition for prestigious local positions, such as *Bupati* (District Mayor) and *Sekwilda* (District secretary), between Moslems and

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<sup>98</sup> Jacques Bertrand. *Nationalism*, op. cit., p. 90.

<sup>99</sup> Supriatma, A. Made Tony. “Communal Violence in Indonesia: A Comparative Study.” Social Sciences for the Study of Conflict in Indonesia. <[www.lipi.go.id](http://www.lipi.go.id)> (accessed October 10, 2005), p. 2.

Christians created tension among the Poso populace. Cultural differences such as customary law and traditions within the diverse society also contributed. Thus, I would argue that the conflict in Poso was not essentially religious. Instead, we should look at it as an ethnic conflict over socio-economic and political matters.

In this chapter, the Poso ethnic conflict will be explained in more detail. First, I will describe the Poso conflict chronologically, from 1998 to 2004. Second, I will analyze the underlying factors within the society that made Poso more susceptible to ethnic conflict. Third, I will explore the Indonesian government's response to the conflict. This section, therefore, will provide an overall picture of the conflict in Poso. My purpose in examining these issues is to attempt to answer my main thesis questions: Why have ethnic conflicts occurred frequently in Indonesia since 1998? Were the conflicts due to differences among Indonesian people, differences of religion, culture, political insights, and economic gaps? What were some of the reasons for the Indonesian government's inability to identify the early symptoms of potential conflict? And what are the constraints and barriers, for the government, in preventing further eruptions of conflict in the future?

## **B. CONFLICT'S CHRONOLOGY**

The conflict in Poso, like the conflict in Maluku, followed President Suharto's resignation in 1998. The conflict claimed the lives of around 1,000 to 2,500 people, both Moslems and Christians and nearly 100,000 fled their burning houses.<sup>100</sup> The long-term conflict was intense and caused a lot of casualties during the course of confrontations and violence. The vast majority of weapons, most of which were eventually turned in, were "machetes, other blades and senjata rakitan" (homemade deadly weapons from small workshops).<sup>101</sup> It was not only well-armed factions, but also the involvement of intruders, that caused mass destruction and the deaths of many people. No one imagined that a small dispute in the heart of Poso City in December 1998 would lead such a harmonious society to experience such widespread ethnic conflict.

Most people believe that the many recent conflicts in Indonesia are part of its colonial legacy. We do not deny that colonialism and its divide-and-conquer policies left

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<sup>100</sup> Aragon, Lorraine V. "Waiting for Peace in Poso," op. cit., p. 1.

<sup>101</sup> Human Rights Watch. "Breakdown," op. cit., p. 6.

the people in Indonesia behind the rest of the developing world for decades. But how did this happen in Poso in particular? Historically, we look back to the Dutch efforts during the early 1900s to convert as many indigenous people in the mountainous interior as possible to Christianity. Their policy was mainly for the purpose of establishing a buffer population against an influential Moslem coastal kingdom that was perceived by the Dutch at the same time as their main threat. The Dutch provided most Christians with new settlements and taught them new agriculture technique how to work, from slash-and-burn farming to a wet-rice farming system. Later, most of these people who lived around Poso Lake, called themselves Pamonans.<sup>102</sup> The Dutch policy of homogenizing a population as a buffer against another group through religious conversion polarized the region and made it susceptible to potential ethnic conflict. Conflict, as we have seen, often surfaces when the central power cannot properly control a region, especially in terms of its politics and socio-economic factors. For instance, when Japan took control in 1942, chaotic conditions erupted and resulted in conflict between Moslems and Christians. But, the conflict that occurred between Moslems and Christian in 1998 was also initially triggered by communal conflicts between the indigenous people and migrants in the city of Poso.

To better understand the nature of the conflict in Poso and how this conflict endured for almost four years, I will describe the conflict chronologically from 1998 to 2004. Not every incident is included; instead, the focus will be on some major events that were recorded by the media and NGOs. According to the data compiled by observers, the conflict can be divided into five phases.<sup>103</sup>

### **1. The First Phase: December 1998**

The first conflict in Poso did not spread widely over the region; instead, it was limited to several neighborhoods in Poso City. The conflict erupted, coincidentally, just after the district chief's announcement on December 13, 1998, that he would not seek re-election.<sup>104</sup> That local political circumstance gave many ambitious candidates a chance to openly compete to become the new chief. In regard to the two prestigious positions,

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<sup>102</sup> Aragon, Lorraine V. "Waiting for Peace in Poso," op. cit., p. 1.

<sup>103</sup> Human Rights Watch. "Breakdown," op. cit., p. 14.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

that of district mayor and that of district secretary, there is an unwritten rule in Poso about how to combine the positions in terms of religion. If the district mayor is a Moslem, then the district secretary must be a Christian, and vice versa.<sup>105</sup> Shortly after the current district mayor's announcement, Poso was overwhelmed by an intense political campaign, which resulted in the raising of tensions between Moslems and Christians. Competition over the district mayor's position was mainly due to the perception that whoever won either position would have more political power over the distribution of contracts, jobs, and scarce resources.

Many versions exist accounting for the initial conflict on Christmas Eve in Poso. One version describes a young resident of the Protestant neighborhood of Lombogia, named Roy Runtu Bisalembah, who was accused of stabbing Ahmad Ridwan, a Moslem from the Kayamanya neighborhood. According to the Christians, after being stabbed, Ridwan fled into a mosque; the Moslems' account says that an attack occurred against a Moslem who was asleep in the mosque's courtyard.<sup>106</sup> Another version describes in detail that the initial conflict erupted between a drunken youth from a Protestant neighborhood and Moslems on the night of Ramadhan.

When Muslims were fasting during Ramadhan, a group of Christians were aggravating those doing tarawih (night prayer), by becoming drunk in the front yard of a mosque. The inebriated/drunk group was asked to leave by one of the mosque's wardens. They accepted at first but they weren't happy. The next day, when the mosque warden was wandering around Poso to wake the Muslims up for sahur (or breakfast), the Christian group stopped the person by offering him to eat pork meat for sahur. He was brutally attacked by the Christian group and then he ran away from them to the mosque. He finally collapsed in the mosque.<sup>107</sup>

After the incident, both sides' religious leaders agreed that the attack on the Moslem was caused by the attackers drinking alcohol, which be banned during Ramadhan. Meanwhile, the police were busy confiscating alcohol in Poso City, which

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<sup>105</sup> Lorraine V. Aragon. "Waiting for Peace in Poso," op. cit., p. 5.

<sup>106</sup> Human Rights Watch. "Breakdown," op. cit., p. 14.

<sup>107</sup> Heru Suseteyo. "Humanitarian campaign for Poso and Maluku-Indonesia" Presented at Hurstville Public School on Friday 17 November 2000 as part of the Australia Road Show on Crimes Against Humanity in Maluku and Poso, Indonesia, organised by the IQRO Foundation Inc. and Islamic Information Centre (IIC). Several other cities in Australia were also visited as part of the campaign.

<E:\HUMANITARIAN CAMPAIGN FOR POSO AND MALUKU - INDONESIA.htm> (accessed May 31, 2005), p. 2.

Moslems also did in their forays. At the same time, several Protestant youths secured many of the shops belonging to Chinese Christians.<sup>108</sup> Inevitably, this was followed by liquor disputes between the Moslems and Christians in Poso City.

Following the initial conflict, deadly fights broke out in Poso, such as the one on December 27, 1998, during which a group of Protestants led by Herman Parimo clashed with Moslems from Palu, Parigi, and Ampana. The local police were unable to prevent the fighting, though they claimed they had closed the road that prevented outsiders from entering Poso City.<sup>109</sup> Eventually, this first phase of the conflict became calmed after the local police arrested and jailed the alleged instigators, Herman Parimo from a Christian faction and Akfar Patanga from the Moslem side. There were also efforts by local and religious leaders from both sides to reduce the conflict using religious and cultural approaches.

Soon afterwards the election for district mayor was held in Poso City. Abdul Muin Pusadan, a Moslem, was elected as the new chief.<sup>110</sup> During the first phase of the conflict, political competition, compounded by politicization of religious issues to attract more people into the conflict in small cities such as Poso, evolved into severe ethnic conflicts. Weak law enforcement by the local police exacerbated a small clash, which then escalated into community clashes in remote areas around Poso.

## **2. The Second Phase: April 16-May 3, 2000**

After almost a year of calm, Poso was not really quite as peaceful as it appeared. The hatred, mutual suspicion, trauma, and revenge triggered during the first phase of the conflict remained among the populace, who then were segregated along religious and socio-cultural lines. These societal circumstances, coupled with weak law enforcement, resulted in renewed conflicts, sparked by a minor clash between some indigenous people and some migrants, or between Moslems and Christians. Furthermore, the media's coverage of stories focused on reader circulation areas, using their influence to send

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<sup>108</sup> Human Rights Watch. "Breakdown," op. cit., p. 14.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>110</sup> Pontoh, Coen Husain. "Dari Sintuwu Maroso ke Sintuwu Molonco" (From Sintuwu Maroso to Sintuwu Molonco). PANTAU, Third Year, No. 024, April 2002.

propaganda to people in both factions.<sup>111</sup> Similar to the previous conflict, this second phase was also triggered by local political issues involved in the election of the district secretary.

While tensions in the communities were already high and competition among the candidates was at its peak, the striking news in the local newspaper *Radar Sulteng*, issued on April 15, raised tension further by publishing a comment by Chaelani Umar, a member of the provincial assembly from the Unity Party (Partai Persatuan).<sup>112</sup> Umar reportedly called on the newly installed district mayor, Abdul Muin Pusadan, to remind him and the local parliament to accommodate the wishes of the local people, who were predominantly Moslem. In short, he stated that the people wanted Ladjalani, a Moslem candidate to be chosen as the new district secretary.<sup>113</sup> Some groups who supported a different candidate took the news account seriously, while others opined that the news was biased and should be ignored.

The day following the news, a young Moslem claimed that he had been attacked by drunken Protestant youths. Similar to the first phase of the conflict, confrontation occurred immediately, involving Christians from Lombogia village and Moslems from the Kayamanya and Sayo village. According to one reporter's data, though Moslems and Christians had stood face to face equipped with various types of weapons, the fight, in reality, had not yet erupted on a wide scale. Realizing that they were not well-organized and were fewer in number than the Moslems, the Christians removed themselves from the battle and sought refuge in the villages, Tentena and Togotu, where Christians were in the majority. On the other hand, local and religious leaders asked the Moslems to have more patience and to withdraw. As a result, they were led back to their homes without any incident against the Christians.<sup>114</sup> Shortly, the Moslems, removed themselves from the conflict zone and headed to their respective villages.

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<sup>111</sup> Syamsul Alam Agus. "Highlighting the State's Role May Helps Stop the Poso Conflict." *Inside Indonesia* (October-December 2002). <file://F:InsideIndonesia-Peace forPoso.htm> (accessed July 10, 2005), p. 2.

<sup>112</sup> Human Rights Watch. "Breakdown," op. cit., p. 16.

<sup>113</sup> Coen Husain Pontoh. "Dari Sintuwu Maroso ke Sintuwu Molonco," op. cit.

<sup>114</sup> Coen Husain Pontoh. "Dari Sintuwu Maroso ke Sintuwu Molonco," op. cit.

On their way home, however, they were shocked and angered by alleged police personnel from mobile brigade units, just arrived in Poso from Palu, who opened fire on the crowd. Initially, the unit had been assigned to back up the local police and maintain security in Poso because it was reported that the violence there was immense. However, as a result of the crowd-shooting, three Moslems died: Mohammad Yusni (23), Yanto (13), and Rozal Machmud, who died later due to his serious injuries.<sup>115</sup> The conflict soon heightened between police and Moslems, and later led to the burning of several police bases. The violence then spread to both Moslems and Christians, in general, and resulted in around four hundred houses and one church being burned in Lombogia village. From then on, aid started arriving in Poso from several places for either Moslems or Christians. One of the local Moslem intellectuals who had worked for a peace organization in Poso stated that he knew without any doubt that the aid to the warring sides included weaponry.<sup>116</sup> Hence, the use of those weapons by both sides was suspected of being one of the factors that triggered future violence.

In addition to the political tension during the district mayor's election, the second conflict phase was also affected by the existence of a politicized judiciary and people's dissatisfaction with law enforcement. These factors can be best explained by looking at the local demands expressed when the North Sulawesi governor, Paliudju, visited the conflict areas in Poso. While he was there, Paliudju met with a Moslem group led by Aliansa Tompo. During the meeting, the Moslems demanded a follow-up on several issues. First, they asked Ladjalani, the district secretarial candidate, to accept the position. Second, they asked that the case against Agfar Patanga, who had been jailed during the first conflict as a suspected provocateur, be dropped. Third, they asked the government to fire the local police chief and, immediately, send the mobile brigade unit back to Palu. Aside from the local people's demands, the second phase of the conflict deeply segregated people in Poso, leading both sides to recognize themselves as the white army for Moslems and the red army for Christians. To maintain peace in Poso, the Regional Military Command in South Sulawesi eventually sent six hundred soldiers, and the

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<sup>115</sup> Human Rights Watch. "Breakdown," op. cit., p. 16.

<sup>116</sup> Coen Husain Pontoh. "Dari Sintuwu Maroso ke Sintuwu Molonco," op. cit.

conflict gradually de-escalated.<sup>117</sup> During the second phase of the conflict, similar to the first one, people in Poso still witnessed how political motives drove people into bloody ethnic conflicts by using religious issues as a tool. Neither Moslems nor Christians realized that, as a result of the conflict, they themselves would suffer, while a small group of people took advantage of the conflict.

### **3. The Third Phase: Retaliation Begins, May 2000**

A Moslem attack on the Christian village of Lombogia during the second phase of the conflict had caused great damage. A few weeks later, the Christians retaliated by raiding Moslem villages and killing many people, including women and children. The people who suffered the most were from South Sulawesi and Gorontalo, but others suffered as well. It was believed that the attackers were the red army, who called themselves the “red bats” and the “black bats.” They consisted mostly of young Protestants who had been displaced during the first and second phases of the conflict and had fled to a red-group training camp in Kelei. Their main targets during the raid were Moslems considered to be responsible for previous conflicts.<sup>118</sup> At this stage of the conflict, although the local government had anticipated a further attack from the Christians, neither local authorities nor local police could prevent clashes from breaking out. The Moslem death toll increased significantly, due to the involvement of more lethal weapons, such as “dum-dums” (homemade weapons) and arrows.

Chronologically, the third phase of conflict can be described as follows. On May 22, 2000 at 2:00 a.m., a group of the red army, masked and led by Fabianus Tibo, moved from Gebang Rejo village to Poso City. The reason the group entered the city was to secure a church thought to be under attack by Moslems. During his trip, Tibo killed one policeman, known as Komaruddin Ali<sup>119</sup> and two other Moslems, Abdul Syukur (40) and Baba (60).<sup>120</sup> Moslems in Poso who watched the incident formed a large group, which immediately went after Tibo and his group. Knowing his group was being approached by Moslems, Tibo quickly ran into a church and hid there. The church was surrounded by

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<sup>117</sup> Human Rights Watch. “Breakdown,” op. cit., p. 16.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Coen Husain Pontoh. “Dari Sintuwu Maroso ke Sintuwu Molonco,” op. cit.

<sup>120</sup> Human Rights Watch. “Breakdown,” op. cit., p. 17.

Moslems; however, police arrived just in time to prevent mass anarchy. The police asked Tibo and his group to surrender, but instead he and his group fled to the hills behind the church. Three ninja members led by Tibo were captured, while Tibo and the rest of the members escaped. Finding that they were not able to seize Tibo, the Moslems burned the church and many motels in their attempt to find other Christians who were allegedly behind the attack.<sup>121</sup> The tension between Moslems and Christians again escalated in Poso, and both sides prepared for future attacks. Road blockades into Poso were set up and civilian search operations implemented, to prevent intruders from attacking.

On May 28, 2000, the Moslem village of Sintuwu Lemba, also known as *Kilo Nine*, was again attacked by the red army, involving Fabianus Tibo and his group and resulting in 191 deaths. Other sources cite the death toll as 39 and say that the bodies were later found in three mass graves. Sintuwu Lemba is only nine kilometers from Poso; it is made up of successful Javanese cacao farmers who migrated there from South Sulawesi. Most of the women and children in the village were captured, and some women were sexually abused. Men who survived the attack fled to Pesantren Wali Songo, a Moslem school, where some of them were later killed with guns and machetes, whether they had surrendered or not. *Kilo Nine* was not the only target attacked: other Moslem villages, such as Tabalo and a village for migrants from Java and Lombok, also became targets. Most victims' accounts of similar attacks describe burning, kidnapping, and killing, by people dressed like "ninjas," who targeted a particular ethnicity. One survivor witnessed:

We were told to gather at the village hall by about 100 men with masks or cloths over their faces. A truck came, and they had a list. They took away eight people from Lombok and four from Java. At 2:00 we were made to walk. We saw a truck with two people in the back: her brother (indicates a young woman) and another relative. He told my wife not to cry, we are just going to get some things in the next town. We never saw them again. We walked all the way to Mapane. We spent two nights there and then went by truck to Poso town. They never told us they would come after us. They just said it was Bugis and Gorontalo they wanted. If they had said that we had to leave, okay we would have. But they never said anything about people from Lombok and Java.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Coen Husain Pontoh. "Dari Sintuwu Maroso ke Sintuwu Molonco," op. cit.

<sup>122</sup> Human Rights Watch. "Breakdown," op. cit., p. 18.

The Christian attacks on Moslem villages during the third phase of the conflict came about mainly in response to their acts of revenge during the second phase, when Moslems attacked Christian villages. The spread of the bloody conflict in Poso finally attracted Jakarta's attention and the need for government to become more seriously involved and to send more troops to Poso.

#### **4. The Fourth Phase: Displacement and Destruction, July 2001-December 2001**

To reduce the tension remaining from the third phase of the conflict, the Palu government eventually asked the central government for help. In response to the desperate call from Palu, the Regional Military Command immediately sent 1,500 more soldiers, ten tanks, and a combat unit. Additional brigade units from Java were also sent to Poso. Hence, both security forces launched security operations: the *Sadar Maleo Operation*, which consisted of a mobile brigade unit and *Operation Cinta Damai* by the Indonesian Army. Most security personnel attached to sensitive areas were tasked to confiscate weapons and install temporary barracks for displaced persons. The local governments also conducted reconciliation efforts, which involved all the governors of central, north and south Sulawesi. In August 2000, all governors signed a peace agreement that emphasized helping and encouraging the return of displaced persons. The governors' effort, based on a local saying, "Sintuwu Maroso" (Strong When United), received much support from President Abdurrahman Wahid, who later joined in the traditional ceremony in Poso.<sup>123</sup> Nevertheless, all the government efforts to forge peace in Poso were reversed, and the conflict escalated even more than before. The outbreak of the fourth phase of the conflict signaled the government that it had failed many times to foster peace in Poso. The suspected involvement of security personnel and outsiders, coupled with people's dissatisfaction with law enforcement exacerbated the violence in fourth phase of the conflict.

Prior to this, in the first few months of 2001, the court had held a trial for the red army members who had allegedly attacked Moslems during the second conflict phase. Three suspects, Fabianus Tibo, Dominggus Soares Da Silva, and Don Marinus Riwu, who had been captured by the Indonesian Army, were charged with killing three

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<sup>123</sup> Human Rights Watch. "Breakdown," op. cit., p. 20.

Moslems in Poso in 1999. Tibo was also charged with carrying out killings 1990, a factor that led people to assume that Tibo had been a hired thug. Although he was a Catholic, Tibo had been recruited by the Protestants to fight against Moslems because he was known as a good fighter. Conversely, his defense council pointed out that Tibo was merely a scapegoat: at fifty-five, he was too old to be a faction leader. He was also an uneducated migrant from Flores. Tibo and his family claimed that, in the 1990 killings, Tibo was only trying to help Moslems in their fight against the Balinese attackers. As for the killing of three Moslems in 1999, he claimed that he just wanted to “protect the Catholic Church compound in Moengko the night of the ninja attack.” During the trial, there were violent protests in front of the courthouse between police and Moslems mostly displaced persons from Poso. The protesters questioned the testimony going on inside the courthouse on Tibo’s case and demanded that the court effectively handle the sixteen ringleaders named by Tibo. On April 5, 2001, all three defendants were sentenced to death for their roles in murdering Moslems.<sup>124</sup> Tibo’s trial was a law-enforcement effort to prosecute people who were involved in bloody conflict; it sought to punish the leaders of warring parties who conducted violence, including killing, looting, and house-burning. Unfortunately, the efforts to bring the instigators to trial raised the tension between Moslems and Christians to a dangerous level. Many people, especially from the Christian side, questioned why the justice system brought only Christians to court while no Moslem was prosecuted.

Following the complicated trial and the reopening of the debate on the issues regarding the election of the district secretary in Poso, both Christians and Moslems blamed the government for failing to settle the conflict effectively. On June 28, 2001, an unidentified group of armed men attacked and burned a vehicle from South Sulawesi, near Watuawu, south of Poso, leaving six people missing. Two days later, Moslems from Ampana marched to Poso to prevent the Christians from demonstrating in front of the official government building. Subsequently, in Malei; a sub-district of Lage, Moslems clashed with Christians, leaving one Moslem dead, two injured, and thirty houses burned. After the massacre of thirteen Moslems at Buyung Katedo, Sayo, and Toyado on July 3, 2001, the conflict intensified. Musa, the imam, or mosque leader, was reportedly burned

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<sup>124</sup> Human Rights Watch. “Breakdown,” op. cit., pp. 20-21.

to death; the other victims, mostly women and children, were killed with machetes. On the same day, the red army also attacked displaced persons' barracks and killed three policemen and one civilian. On July 5, 2001, hundreds of red army soldiers were reported by the police and army to have set fire to the barracks that had been built for Moslems. After a warning shot, the police and army tried to secure the barracks, killing six red army members.<sup>125</sup> The course of the described above signaled that the conflict in Poso was not over. It had led to even greater destruction during the fourth phase. The ongoing confrontations continued for almost three years, raising questions from many Indonesian people as to why the government could not bring peace to Poso, despite its recent efforts. Later, that government failure would give way to hard-line religious groups attempting to justify their involvement the violence.

Over a period of four years, the impact of this simmering conflict, and the government's failure to stop it, encouraged Laskar Jihad, based hundreds of miles away on Java, to intervene in Poso. Its initial reasons for coming into Poso were to provide humanitarian assistance and to protect Moslems from Christian attacks. In July of 2001, Laskar Jihad was received warmly by Poso Moslems, who could no longer rely on local security forces for their security. In October of 2001, the police were about to continue *Operation Sadar Maleo V*. In effect, the initial conflict between Christians and Moslems then shifted to a conflict between some Christians and Moslems and the police, also involving Laskar Jihad. That same month, a confrontation between police and Laskar Jihad, known as the Mapane Incident, broke out in Poso. According to the Laskar Jihad's version, on October 18, Moslems from Tabalo were chased by Christian Batalemba from their cacao grove. The police did nothing to help. During the evening, the Moslems retaliated, burning a car carrying goods from Batalemba and chasing the driver and the police who guarded it. On October 20, Laskar Jihad and Tabalo Moslems, coupled with "supplemental troops" (laskar bantuan), prepared to attack the Batalemba village. In the incident, while a mobile brigade unit tried to prevent the attack, one mobile brigade unit's member known as Ardiansyah was killed by a Moslem. As a result, police and other security forces intensified their search operation for illegal weapons, halting Moslems

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<sup>125</sup> Human Rights Watch. "Breakdown," op. cit., pp. 21-22.

and Christians caught carrying weapons and intending to engage in the conflict.<sup>126</sup> During the police sweep operation, Moslems and Christians often accused police of mistreating and harassing people. Local people in Poso also questioned the improper detention of citizens by the police for possession of weapons.

Though not very involved in the conflict with police and security forces, in villages surrounding Poso, Laskar Jihad confrontation with Christians remained intense. After the Mapane Incident, a November incident brought Moslems and Christians back into a war. On November 11, 2001, fighting between Moslems and Christians at *Jembatan II* left several casualties, including a retired soldier. The next day, the fight continued at the border of Tanah Runtu and Lembomawu villages, involving hundreds of people, which ended only after security forces and police arrived on the scene. After a few weeks of relative calm, on November 27 the conflict broke out again when Christians from Batalemba attacked and fired on Moslems in Tabolo village. According to Moslem sources, two people were killed, Muhammad Sanusi (33) and Yudi (15). The Christians claimed that one person, Kede (30), died in Batalemba. The attack, between Christians and Moslems in Poso's surrounding villages continued until December 2001. In the course of the confrontation, eight villages in Poso Pesisir and Lage district were burned to the ground and as many as 11,000 persons were displaced and fled to the hills of Tapu. It was the largest scale conflict since the 2000 attacks during the third phase of conflict. The conflict also affected Balinese, who had previously not been targeted. Almost 1,400 Baliness were forced to seek refuge in other districts.<sup>127</sup>

The wave of bloody confrontation that had continued for almost three years claimed scores of lives, and many houses, as well as houses of worship, and caused hundreds of thousands to flee from their villages. These events, once again, drew the central government's attention to Poso. Eventually, President Megawati's government decided to send Mr. Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, the coordinating minister for politics and security, and Mr. Yusuf Kalla, the coordinating minister for people's welfare, to begin discussions with local religious leaders. Led by Mr. Yusuf Kalla, the first meeting, held in Makassar in November 2001, involved three Moslems leaders, Adnan Arsal, Haji

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<sup>126</sup> Human Rights Watch. "Breakdown," op. cit., pp. 23-24.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., pp. 25-27.

Hasanudin, and Abdul Wahid Lamidji, and two Christian leaders, Rev. J. Santo and Rev. Rinaldy Damanik.<sup>128</sup> A second meeting, held December 19-20, 2001, resulted in an agreement to halt the conflict and to work together comprehensively to maintain peace in Poso. A ten point Malino Declaration was finally signed by both delegations: twenty-four Christians and twenty-five Moslems from their respective communities in Poso and Palu. The meeting was also attended by high-ranking officials from Sulawesi and as an observer, by Maj. Gen. Achmad Yahya, the chief of the Wirabuana Military Command.<sup>129</sup> The ten points of the Malino Accord are as follows:

1. To cease all forms of conflicts and disputes
2. To obey efforts to enforce the law and support legal sanctions against lawbreakers
3. To ask the state apparatus to act firmly and justly to maintain security
4. In order to create a condition of peace, to reject the imposition of a state of emergency and any foreign party involvement
5. To dismiss slander and dishonesty against all parties and enforce an attitude of mutual respect, and to forgive for the sake of peaceful coexistence
6. Poso is an integral part of Indonesia. Therefore every citizen has the right to live, come and stay peacefully and respectfully of local customs
7. All rights and belongings have to be returned to their lawful owners as they were before the conflict began
8. To return all displaced people to their respective place
9. Together with the government, to carry out complete rehabilitation of the economic infrastructure
10. To carry out respective religious law according to the principle of mutual respect and to abide by all the agreed upon rules, in the form of laws, government regulations, or other regulation.<sup>130</sup>

In addition to the Malino Accord, both factions agreed to establish two joint commissions, one that would deal with law and one that would deal with social and economic conditions. Although the Accord did not end the hostilities at every level, it nonetheless made a significant contribution to the rebuilding of mutual trust and peaceful

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<sup>128</sup> International Crisis Group. "Indonesia Backgrounder," op. cit., p. 14.

<sup>129</sup> The Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia. *Malino Declaration Signed by the Two Warring Parties, To End Conflict and Create Peace in Poso, Central Sulawesi*. Washington, D.C., December 28, 2001, p. 2.

<sup>130</sup> Human Rights Watch. "Breakdown," op. cit., pp. 30-31.

coexistence in Poso. However, weaknesses of the Malino Accord, especially with regard to the implementation of all points of the agreement, gradually came into question. These will be illustrated in my discussion of the fifth of the conflict.

##### **5. The Fifth Phase: After Malino**

Societal tensions after the Malino Accord were less than they had been in Poso. Although the peace agreement could not fully guarantee personal security for everyone, it at least reduced the tension between Moslems and Christians. And it gave people on both sides a chance to end the conflict and return to their normal lives. However, that was not an easy thing to do in Poso. Local people frequently spoke of Poso's fragile peace, describing Poso an unsafe, but secure place, meaning that attack from others could still happen at any time even during a time of peace. Most people sent relatives home to clean up and build temporary housing, but they had no intention of leaving their carefully built shelters.<sup>131</sup> People were still traumatized and worried about the implementation of the Malino Accord in their daily lives. Though people supported the peace agreement, they watched its implementation carefully due to their general mistrust of the government.

Even after quite a while, the Malino Accord continued to be threatened with failure in Poso. Permanent peace was still far from people's hopes. A hundred and twenty-nine violations of the Malino Accord have been recorded from the time the agreement was signed in December 2001 until 2004.<sup>132</sup> But, "the violence after the Malino Accord differed from what had preceded it. There were very few clashes between communities. Most attacks were reported as 'mysterious shootings,' and 'bomb explosions,' and officials frequently blamed them on 'outside elements' that wanted to sabotage the peace process."<sup>133</sup> The weaknesses of the Malino Accord can be looked at from different perspectives. One claim that, "the declaration is elitist, relies on a quantitative measure of success, and is laden with opportunities for profitable 'projects.'"<sup>134</sup> Another find that, "the Accord also separates social rehabilitation, reconstruction of facilities, and security, as if these three concerns were not related."<sup>135</sup> Due to a lack of adequate information between the different levels of people, all both sides were easily

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<sup>131</sup> Human Rights Watch. "Breakdown," op. cit., p. 34.

<sup>132</sup> Haris Azhar and Syamsul Alam Agus. "Poso: An Area Put to Conflict." <[file:///F:/Poso An Area Put to Conflict.htm](file:///F:/Poso%20An%20Area%20Put%20to%20Conflict.htm)> (accessed July 10, 2005), p. 2.

<sup>133</sup> International Crisis Group. "Indonesia Backgrounder," op. cit., p. 16.

influenced by divisive statements in the media.<sup>134</sup> Even though these factors of impending peace in Poso were recognized by the government, peace could not be sustained effectively. The government put a lot of effort into rebuilding mutual trust among the people by launching law enforcement programs, but people in Poso were still disappointed. Very few perpetrators were captured or punished. The manifestations of that disappointment are the conflicts that surfaced after the Malino Accord.

At this point, some identification of the involvement perpetrators and their motives is in order. It will give us a clearer picture of how the conflict evolved and how it was conducted, from the first phase of the conflict onward. One group of perpetrators was essentially an ideological group, “consisting of Moslem and Christian fanatics who continue to stoke rivalry based on misplaced religious loyalty.” A second group is more or less a “floating mass” of individuals trying to encourage chaos for personal benefit. Lastly is a group known as the “victim group” those “who harbor deep hatred and take revenge for the death of their loved ones.”<sup>135</sup> The fact that these groups had been involved from the conflict’s beginning and the ineffectiveness of the government’s efforts to peacefully settle and end the conflict in Poso compounded the ongoing problems. Because so many possibilities and motives were involved in the violence, it was hard for the security forces to identify and capture the perpetrators. However, there is no doubt that the existence of professional, unbiased security forces might prove more successful.

By a significant effort, the security forces intensified their door-to-door search operations, shifting the form of the conflict after the Malino Accord from communal clashes into sporadic and mysterious shootings and bombings. Equally important, an internal local security system, known as neighborhood watch groups (*sistem keamanan lingkungan*) was also installed by the security forces. Although the deployment security force supported by the local people was increased, violence after the Malino Accord still prevailed. Incidents include the bombing of four protestant churches in Palu on December 31, 2001, less than two weeks after the Malino Accord was signed.<sup>136</sup> During

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<sup>134</sup> Alam Agus, Syamsul. “Highlighting,” op. cit., p. 2.

<sup>135</sup> “Who’s Behind the Poso, Palu Violence this Time?” *The Jakarta Post*. December 20, 2004.

<sup>136</sup> International Crisis Group. “Indonesia Backgrounder,” op. cit., p. 15.

July 2002, five mysterious shooting incidents were reported in which five civilians from Poso pesisir, South Pamona subdistrict, and Lage district were killed.<sup>137</sup> On December 5, a bomb explosion hit an automobile dealership owned by Mr. Yusuf Kalla and another hit the McDonald's restaurant at a mall in Makasar.<sup>138</sup> In addition to the sporadic violence, on October 12, 2002, a tremendous bomb explosion hit Bali, Indonesia, causing Laskar Jihad to publicly announce its departure from Palu.<sup>139</sup> That announcement was received happily by the people in Poso, especially the Christian community, which allegedly considered the Laskar Jihad as the main actors in the current conflict. Overall, the course of violent conflict in Poso caused both sides, Moslem and Christian tremendous suffering. An important lesson can be learned from the conflict in Poso: politicizing religious issues so as to involve a maximum amount of people in the conflict for a single group's of political benefit is, potentially, a very volatile situation. It needs to be identified and evaluated as early as possible by the government. By doing so, possible future conflicts can be prevented or avoided.

### C. THE UNDERLYING FACTORS OF ETHNIC CONFLICT

The conflict in Poso had underlying factors similar to those in Molluca. As noted earlier (see the Molluca conflict section), it is the underlying social factors that define the essential nature of a dispute among people before it actually manifests itself in violent actions. In both Poso and Molucca, it is important to remember, the various groups among their populaces had lived in close relationships for decades before the conflict broke out. It was a conjuncture of major events in Indonesia—the collapse of Suharto's presidency, the severe economic crisis in 1997, the premature adoption of democracy and reform, and the abrupt implementation of regional autonomy—that sharpened the differences among the people in the multiethnic regions of Molluca and Poso.<sup>140</sup> These significant transitional events aggravated the differences within the society and set off ethnic conflict in both regions. Given the commonality of the Molluca and Poso conflicts, the next section will focus on Molluca's similar underlying factors. They include political

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<sup>137</sup> Human Rights Watch. "Breakdown," op. cit., p. 34.

<sup>138</sup> International Crisis Group. "Indonesia Backgrounder," op. cit., p. 15.

<sup>139</sup> Human Rights Watch. "Breakdown," op. cit., p. 38.

<sup>140</sup> Ian L. Betts. "Post-Suharto Social Conflict in Indonesia: Analysis and Treatment." University of Colorado. August 2003, p. 13.

disputes, economic and social disparities, religious differences, cultural differences, and tribal disputes. To begin, I will briefly really and describe the political disputes in Poso, to provide the necessary background.

### 1. Political Disputes

There is a common idea that a prior political dispute led to the wide-spread ethnic conflict in Poso. An informal arrangement of “power sharing” between Moslems and Christians was ruined by the new political order installed during the period of the transitional governments of Presidents Habibie, Gus Dur, and Megawati. People in Poso hoped to share the overall power through several strategic positions in the district governments, especially where the district head (bupati) and the district secretary (*sekretaris wilayah daerah or sekda*) were concerned. “A Moslem bupati was expected to have a Protestant sekwilda, and vice versa.”<sup>141</sup> That informal arrangement had existed for decades. What made Poso relatively peaceful in terms of political power-sharing then is exactly the same condition referred to by Ulrich Schneckener in “Model of Ethnic Conflict Regulation.”

The key idea of any power-sharing structure is that two or more ethnic groups have to rule the common polity jointly and take decisions by consensus. No single group can decide important matters without the consent of the other(s). On the basis of informal or formal rules all groups have access to political power and other resources.<sup>142</sup>

Unfortunately, by the time Poso’s autonomous regulations were initially imposed after the collapse of President Suharto’s regime, the political dispute had already begun and was being fueled by the ethnic conflict in Poso. The following data from Moslem academics on the religious affiliation of officeholders between 1989 and 1999 helps to explain the shift in the political balance of power in Poso.

At the time, more Moslems than Christian occupied many strategic positions within the district government, for example, positions in the office of head district, agencies (*dinas*), divisions (*bagian*), and subdistricts (*kecamatan*). In addition, the percentage of Christian officeholders decreased from 54 percent to 39 percent, while the

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<sup>141</sup> Human Rights Watch. “Breakdown,” op. cit., p. 8.

<sup>142</sup> Ulrich Schneckener. “Models of Ethnic Conflict Regulation: The Politics of Recognition.” In *Managing and Settling Ethnic Conflict*. New York, 2004, p. 25.

percentage of Moslems rose accordingly. The Human Rights Watch agency in Indonesia concluded that “the chronology of the conflict suggests a connection between the question of power sharing and outbreaks of violence.” The first phase of the conflict broke out just after the district head announced on December 13, 1998, that he would not seek re-election. One explanation for the second phase of the conflict, which coincided with the district secretary’s election in April 2000, is that a preferred candidate was not chosen. Similarly, the fourth phase of conflict occurred in July 2001, also coinciding with a district secretary election.<sup>143</sup> In Poso, the change in the balance of political power and the abolishment of informal mechanisms of power-sharing sharpened the differences among people and subsequently polarized Moslems and Christians. The course of the conflict and its connection to political disputes about strategic positions in the district government reinforce my argument that politics was a substantial factor in triggering conflict in Poso.

Religious factors were also undeniable elements in the triggering of Poso’s ethnic conflict. Indeed, religious goals “were secondary to political ones.” A report by Moslem academics, who compiled the data, and a statement by a Moslem religious leader also support this argument. According to the report, “67 percent of those surveyed attributed the conflict to politics, primarily competition for positions. Only 6 percent described the cause as religious.” Furthermore, a Moslem religious leader who was involved in various early conflicts in Poso agreed: “Politics. Then religion was dragged in, brought inadvertently. Politicians from both sides tried to gain support through religion.”<sup>144</sup> The Norwegian Refugee Council and the *Far Eastern Economic Review* also found that political disputes outweigh other combined factors that contributed to the ethnic conflict in Poso: “Political and religious leaders in the area agree that a combination of forces were at work in creating the unrest, and that local political elites used the communal strife as a means of galvanizing support drawn on religious lines.”<sup>145</sup> Therefore, the role of the local political elites and their actions were apparently a direct result of changes in Poso’s political arena. This can be best explained by looking at the emotion-based theory

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<sup>143</sup> Human Rights Watch. “Breakdown,” op. cit., p. 8.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., pp. 7-8.

<sup>145</sup> Ian L. Betts. “Post-Suharto,” op. cit., p. 8.

proposed by Petersen. “When individuals come to believe that the new situation has produced some type of discrepancy among groups, or has produced a perceived threat from another group, an emotion results that generates a change in the saliency of particular desire.”<sup>146</sup> Thus political elites who perceived a threat from other groups used religion as their vehicle to gain support from the masses, a strategy that eventually resulted in conflict. The political-dispute perspective gives us a clearer understanding of how conflict in Poso both evolved and was prolonged. Similar to Molluca, conflict in Poso cannot be separated from its political disputes, though national political disputes affected the region less than in Molluca.

## **2. Economic and Social Disparities**

Since political struggle has its own implications for economic and social status in Poso, political power is deemed as an essential part of people’s lives, especially by local politicians. Political power is interpreted in this context as a means to gain control over the distribution of government contracts, aid, and jobs. Moreover, people from both sides use their political power to compete with each other in order to secure land and access to markets for their goods. Nonetheless, there had been a good trading relationship for many years between Moslems who lived in the coastline areas and the Christians who lived in upland areas. But that mutual relationship gradually faded away after people within both areas were overwhelmed by economic problems that were, in turn, exacerbated by the severe economic crisis of 1997 and the influx of migrants. Subsequently, the good working relationship between Moslems and Christians turned into harsh competition over scarce resources. By the time it occurred, the conflict of interests over economic matters had spread not only to urban areas but also into rural areas where ethnic Javanese and Bugese usually engaged in competition with ethnic Pamona (indigenous people) over land for cash crops.<sup>147</sup> All these economic tensions between indigenous people and migrants caused one or another group of people to attack each other. This fragile societal condition proved ideal for ethnic conflicts to take place. As we have seen, even a small clash can do it.

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<sup>146</sup> Roger D. Petersen, *Understanding Ethnic Violence*. Cambridge University Press, United Kingdom, 2002, p. 23.

<sup>147</sup> Human Rights Watch. “Breakdown,” op. cit., p. 9.

To explain the economic and social disparities that triggered the ethnic conflict in Poso, I use the security-dilemma theory proposed by Beverly Crawford. She points out that the conflict might break out when a group of people wants “to grasp the resources that assure their security before these resources are seized by an opposing group.” In the case of Poso, when the central government lost its absolute power to control the region, causing a situation “[w]here anarchy prevails, people tend to seek security above all other goals. Their quest for security leads them to take measures that render other groups insecure, and those groups, in turn, take measures that threaten others.”<sup>148</sup> This is exactly what was happening in Poso prior to the first and second phases of the conflict, in 1998 and 1999, respectively. The failure of authority to address the problem impartially during those periods thus intensified the security dilemma between Moslems and Christians. Eventually, a third phase of the conflict broke out in mid 2000, after Christians took revenge against the Moslems, who had allegedly been involved in the previous conflict. By that time, however, hundreds of people had been killed. The Christians justified the matter of injustice, reflecting social tension against Moslems during the third phase of the conflict, due to economic disputes between indigenous people and migrants such as controlling access to land for cash crops and competing for strategic positions in district governments to control contracts, aid and jobs.

### **3. Religious Differences**

The conflict in Poso was initially sparked on Christmas Eve in 1998, by a fight between a drunken youth from a Christian village and a Moslem youth, which polarized people in Poso into a dual religious alignment. For years before, people’s lives had already been segregated, as in general, migrants and indigenous people lived in separate areas. Most Moslems lived in the coastal areas, while Christians lived in the upland areas. When the initial conflict broke out, coinciding with the local political campaign for a district head in 1998, religious affiliations became more important than civil responsibility to people’s sense of identity. Moreover, after the third phase of the conflict in April 2000, religion played a more prominent role than ever before. Many groups

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<sup>148</sup> Beverly Crawford. “The Causes of Cultural Conflict: An Institutional Approach.” In *The Myth of “Ethnic Conflict”: Politics, Economics, and “Cultural” Violence*, edited by Beverly Crawford and Ronnie D. Lipschutz. University of California Press/University of California International and Area Studies Digital Collection, Edited Volume #98, pp. 3-43, 1998.

<<http://repositories.cdlib.org/uciaspubs/research/98/2>> (Accessed April, 9 2005), p. 13.

referred to themselves by their religion such as the “red army” for Christians and the “laskar jihad” for Moslems. These circumstances lead us to conclude that the conflicts in Poso cannot be separated from religious issues and that, in many ways, religion has profoundly polarized the Poso populace. Once conflict erupted, the Moslems and Christians had very different ways of viewing it. On the one hand, Moslems argued that “reports of forced conversion, destruction of houses of worship, and attacks on local Moslems as well as migrants demonstrated the religious nature of the conflict.” On the other hand, “Christians, especially solidarity groups abroad, depicted the conflict as an Islamic ‘holy war’ against the Protestants.”<sup>149</sup> These contrasting points of view toward the conflict exacerbated and polarized the society and eventually undermined the government’s efforts to end the conflicts peacefully.

In retrospect, religious tensions have historically been embedded within Poso society. Up to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Islam had not yet spread widely in Eastern Indonesia, including Central Sulawesi. Nonetheless, competition between Islam and the Christianity brought by the Portuguese and Spanish was intense, in terms of converting an animistic indigenous people to either Islam or Christianity. And later, during the following century, the Dutch introduced of Protestantism as yet another new form of worship,<sup>150</sup> and another potential source of religious tension in Central Sulawesi. Since then, religious tensions have gradually increased, since migrants and voluntary migrants, through transmigration sponsored by the Indonesian government, brought more people, mostly Moslems, into Central Sulawesi. In regard to the role of religion in the Poso conflict, Bertrand argues: “The differentiation along the religious and ethnic identities was important in the expression of conflict. While economic motivations may have underlain some tensions, they tended to be stronger if combined with differences in religion.”<sup>151</sup> Another way to explain how religious tension fueled the conflict in Poso is discussed by Elwin Tobing in terms of “the perception about other religions.”

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<sup>149</sup> Human Rights Watch. “Breakdown,” op. cit., p. 7.

<sup>150</sup> U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (U.S.C.I.R.F.I). Report on Indonesia, Washington, D.C., May 2002, p. 9.

<sup>151</sup> Jacques Bertrand. *Nationalism*, op. cit., p. 94.

Perhaps there is an unconscious distrust, a hidden enmity, toward the other religion deeply seated in the development of each religion itself. The latent mutual distrust among religious followers has enabled factors such as political, economic and social tensions including external forces to create such a horrible and uncontrollable violence. In Poso...[h]ere we are particularly being confronted with the ever haunting phenomenon of Islamization versus Christianization. There is a latent suspicion covertly cherished by each religious community toward one another, particularly among Moslems and Christians, of the problem of “Islamization” and “Christianization.”<sup>152</sup>

Even though many people believe that conflict in Poso was not religious, religious roles did indeed fuel the conflict and thus cannot be ignored.

#### **4. Cultural Differences**

As in the conflict in Molluca, in the case of Poso, the extent to which the cultural differences between indigenous people and migrants contributed to the conflict is less important than other factors such as the accompanying political and economic and social disputes. As Human Development Report has concluded “Cultural differences are not the primary cause of the conflict.”<sup>153</sup> However, in contrast, as Horowitz points out, ethnic conflicts are often labeled cultural conflicts because it is generally cultural differences that divide ethnic groups, especially when we turn to the political arena. He further emphasizes that there are conceptions of the role of cultural differences in the politics of ethnic relations, which make a society have many cultural sections and one of them dominates the others.<sup>154</sup> As has been pointed out, although the tension between indigenous people and migrants in Poso may come first from political, economic, and religious factors, cultural differences may provoke further conflict.

Similar to the conflict in Molluca, the ethnic conflicts in Poso were also fueled by the customary differences between the indigenous people and the migrants over alcohol consumption that leads to violence. An example of that cultural difference is the incident

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<sup>152</sup> Elwin Tobing, “Religion: A vehicle to Build A United Indonesia.” *The Indonesian Institute*. (November 209 2005). <<http://www.theindonesianinstitute.org/pers112003.htm>> (accessed June 2, 2005), p. 10.

<sup>153</sup> “Challenges for Cultural Liberty” in *Cultural Liberty in Today’s Diverse World*. Human Development Report 2004. <[http://hdr.undp.org/reports/global/2004/pdf/hdr04\\_chapter\\_2.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/reports/global/2004/pdf/hdr04_chapter_2.pdf)> (accessed October 10, 2005), p. 41.

<sup>154</sup> Donald L. Horowitz. *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*. University of California Press, California, 1985, pp. 135-136.

that occurred in Poso when a drunken youth from a Christian village attacked a young Moslem during *Ramadhan*. Subsequently, both Moslem and Christian religious leaders agreed to ban alcohol consumption during *Ramadhan* to show respect to Moslems, who were fasting. Confrontations were ongoing because the Moslems tried to diminish alcohol circulation by directly attacking liquor shops. And Christians tried to protect the liquor shops, most of which belonged to Chinese Christians. In any circumstance, a lack of mutual respect and ignorance of cultural differences can be a breeding ground for ethnic conflict, as happened in both Poso and Maluku.

### 5. Tribal Disputes

Interethnic relations in Poso have not yet been seriously studied. For instance, there are very few articles that explain clearly how “mainly ‘native’ highland Pamona, Mori, and Lore along with Minahasa and Toraja migrants versus mainly coastal migrant Bugese, Gorontalo, Kaili, and Arabs along with ‘native’ Tojo residents”<sup>155</sup> got involved in the conflict. Looking back at the first phase of the conflict in Poso in 1998, we can see that the initial dispute took place between two youths from different ethnic and religious affiliations. All of a sudden, a series of small conflicts led to a large-scale ethnic conflict. This form of conflict is explained by Bertrand as a riot form that escalates to the phase of violence.

Riots are one of the most common forms, in which groups react to an event that provokes violence when tensions are running high. A first incident can become a repeated series of riots in a chain of violent events that are increasingly independent from the original sources of tension between groups. Violence becomes the product of cycles of anger and revenge, of reinterpretation of group relations, and of a new discourse about violent events that sets the stage for future conflict.<sup>156</sup>

What Bertrand describes is how the ethnic conflict in Poso exactly evolved, as an initial tribal dispute between migrants and indigenous people contributed to a large-scale ethnic conflict. The latent intertribal disputes in Poso over politics, economics, and religion surfaced as a form of anger and hatred once one group of people felt threatened by another.

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<sup>155</sup> Lorraine V. Aragon. “Mass Media Fragmentation and Narratives of Violent Action in Sulawesi’s Poso Conflict.” *Indonesia*. April 2005, 79, p. 7.

<sup>156</sup> Jacques Bertrand. *Nationalism*, op. cit., p. 14.

In explaining ethnic conflict in Poso and anywhere else where tribal disputes ostensibly fueled a larger scale of violence, many policy makers and journalists point out that the cause is “simple and straightforward.” Brown, in his essay “Ethnic and Internal Conflict: Causes and Implication,” says that the “ancient hatred” that each ethnic and religious group of people belongs to is a driving force behind all these violent conflicts.<sup>157</sup> But how do tribal disputes based on ancient hatred constitute a larger scale of violence? Peter Ulvin in his article “Prejudice, Crisis, and Genocide in Rwanda,” explains how one ethnic group of people prepares for mass violence: three phases aim to overcome the moral inhibitions against violence. First, there is “authorization, which absolves the individual of the responsibility to make moral choices”; second is “routinization, when the action becomes so organized that there is no opportunity for raising moral questions”; and last is “dehumanization, when the actors’ attitude toward the target and toward themselves become so structured that it is neither necessary nor possible for them to view the relationship in moral terms.”<sup>158</sup> All the theories offered here contribute to an overall explanation of how the tribal disputes among the populace in Poso eventually led to ethnic conflicts. Once even a small clash erupted, each group, migrants and indigenous people, sensing a lack of justice, prepares for mass violence. The bias and asymmetry of information from media also hastened the advent of the three phases of mass violence in Poso. In short, tribal disputes in Poso contributed to a large - scale ethnic conflict that began in 1998.

#### **D. THE INDONESIAN GOVERNMENT’S RESPONSES**

Indonesia has experienced many ethnic conflicts since 1997, during a time when the national economy and politics were very weak. This phenomenon attracted government attention to particular regions—Molluca, Poso, Kalimantan, Sumatera and Java—where ethnic conflicts and riots sporadically took place. Some of them were successfully resolved; others were ongoing at the time this thesis was being written (2005). In the case of Poso, and most likely the conflict in Molluca, it took several years for the government to end the conflict that quickly spread throughout those two regions. In 2002, an International Commission for Religious Freedom report accused the

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<sup>157</sup> Michael Brown. “The Challenges,” op. cit., p. 209.

<sup>158</sup> Peter Ulvin, “Prejudice, Crisis, and Genocide in Rwanda” *African Studies Review*, Vol. 40, Issue 2, September 1999. p. 111.

Indonesian government of neglecting the conflict in Poso, when it was still contained in one area, and making almost no effort to stop the violence. Moreover, the commission further pointed out that a statement made by President Abdurrahman Wahid about the way the conflict should be ended by the people of Poso was a sign of the government's frivolity. Wahid stated that the people of Poso should halt the conflict through their own efforts; the government should only acts as a facilitator.<sup>159</sup> The weakness of the transitional government under President Abdurrahman Wahid is reflected in the way he dealt with the initial conflict in Poso. Nonetheless, President Wahid was not totally to blame. Many other aspects have to be looked at in order to determine the government's failure. They include, for example, the legacy from the previous administrator, the national political and economic chaos, as well as the lack of ability of the local governments and security forces. Moreover, Poso was a remote area with no airfield or media at the time the initial conflict took place. However, the security of the Indonesian people is the government's responsibility.

Prior to the Malino Accord in 2001, as explained earlier, the provincial and district governments implemented a series of ineffective reconciliation efforts to deal with the conflict in Poso. From the first to the third phase of the conflict, the central government addressed the conflict by calling local leaders to sit down together and write a peace agreement. That is a standard tactic in such situation. The *Rujuk Sintuwu Maroso* (Sintuwu Maroso reconciliation) was one such example pursued by the government. During the process of reconciliation, after the August 2000 agreement, a team of traditional leaders formed, established dialogues, and visited the sites of prior conflicts. Due to its limited focus on only traditional leaders, however, and given the deep-seated mistrust among the leaders, the agreement was not effective enough to halt the conflict. The government was criticized for failing to bring the "local community, religious and traditional leaders into a meaningful way" to engage in the peace-agreement process.<sup>160</sup> The results of the government's efforts during the initial conflict were obscured by the way the government identified the source of the problem and involved the people of

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<sup>159</sup> U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, op. cit., May 2002, p. 9.

<sup>160</sup> Human Rights Watch. "Breakdown," op. cit., p. 45.

Poso. The ensuing lack of success in the government attempt to find solutions for both warring parties allowed the conflict to be sustained in Poso.

The next effort by the government, during the fourth phase of the conflict in 2001, was to send a reconciliation team consisting of provincial figures from Palu, under Vice-Governor Rully Lamadjijo, to settle the conflict. Again, the team failed and was “criticized as ineffective, top-down, and a waste of time and money by provincial assembly members and others.” The team failed because those engaged in the peace – agreement process did not represent the general populace of Poso. In the following months, another joint team of provincial officials, led by Colonel Gumyadi, was posted in Poso. The main tasks of the team were to determine the root causes of the conflict and to collect data on property left behind by displaced persons. During the middle of October 2001, the team leader abandoned the mission because he was dissatisfied with the failure of security forces to disarm the warring parties. Another member of the team revealed that it had failed because the team was “underfunded, bombed in Mapane, thrown out of Poso, and yelled at in Tentena.”<sup>161</sup> Despite the government’s failed efforts prior to the Malino Accord, it had tried to halt and end the conflict peacefully by sending troops and police to settle the conflict through cultural and religious approaches and a declaration of martial law in Poso. In short, the government’s efforts only came to light after Mr. Yusuf Kalla and Mr. Bambang Yudhoyono were sent to Poso to comprehensively end the conflict. This resulted in the signing of the Malino Accord by both warring parties—Moslems and Christians—in December 2001, even though sporadic violence still continued.

## E. CONCLUSION

Major events in Indonesia—the collapse of President Suharto’s presidency, the severe economic crisis in 1997, the premature adoption of democracy and reform, and the abrupt implementation of regional autonomy—sharpened the differences among the population of multiethnic regions all over Indonesia. Those national events are in part to blame for the ethnic conflicts in particular areas, including Poso. Moreover, in the case of Poso, underlying factors such as political disputes, social and economic disparities, religious and cultural differences also contributed to the ethnic conflicts. The

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<sup>161</sup> Human Rights Watch. “Breakdown,” op. cit., p. 45.

combination of national and local factors eventually led to the severe ethnic conflicts in Poso on Christmas Eve, 1998, which the local security forces were unable to stop. As a result, this conflict was ongoing for almost four years, resulting in the deaths of from 1,000 to 2,500 people.

Among the factors that I have mentioned so far, the local political disputes over the district mayor and district secretary elections outweighed other factors and established a breeding ground for ethnic conflict in Poso. The changing balance of power in local politics, leading to shifts in the way Moslems and Christians shared their political and religious power, was the main reason for Poso's ethnic conflicts. Unquestionably, I find that the course of the conflict and its connection to political disputes over strategic positions in district governments was a substantial factor in triggering the conflict. At the same time, other factors such as social/economic disparities, and religious and cultural differences were used by politicians as vehicles to bring more people into the conflict.

After the conflict erupted in Poso, a lack of justice and security guarantees from the government created mutual distrust between the peoples of Poso and government officials. That mutual distrust has hindered every government effort to seek peace in Poso, especially before the Malino Accord was signed at the end of 2001. In effect, the people, both Moslems and Christians, must live segregated by religious lines, which polarizes both groups. Conflict in Poso, then, was known and appeared as a religious conflict, rather than a purely ethnic conflict between the indigenous people and migrants over politics and the economy. Nevertheless, the conflict in Poso is not basically religious conflict, describing it as religious is definitely misleading.

## **IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDED MEASURES**

### **A. CONCLUSION**

After 1997, Indonesia experienced for the first time several severe ethnic conflicts. Since then, severe conflicts have occurred between various groups based on their ethnicity, religion, or social position in such places as Kalimantan, Central Sulawesi, Maluku, and even in Jakarta when anti-Chinese riots took place in 1998, destroying large parts of Indonesia's capital city. These ethnic conflicts erupted partly because of the collapse of President Suharto's regime, the severe economic crisis, which had started in 1997, and the Indonesian government's sudden movement to embrace democracy during the transitional period. Subsequently these events produced deep shock and uncertainty within people's lives, and led to chaos everywhere.

In addition to several political and economic crises from 1997 onward, several other underlying factors have exacerbated the problems. I realized these factors when examining two case studies of ethnic conflict: in Poso and Maluku. One underlying factor is political disputes among local politicians in their effort to gain strategic political seats such as district chief and district secretary. In effect, political competition based on ethnicity and religion had increased the tension among political supporters, particularly during the campaign, and eventually polarized people according to their ethnicity and religion. Another underlying factor is economic and social disparities among the populace, especially since the economic crisis in 1997. The unemployment rate has increased the severity of the economic crisis, especially among the youth. As a result, social tension has become more intense and people are more easily provoked by sensitive issues such as politics and religion to resort to violence in settling disputes. A third underlying factor that has contributed to conflicts is religious differences, which is an issue that has been used by elites and conflict entrepreneurs to mobilize people to support political agendas. Empirically, in the ethnic conflicts in Indonesia, religion has been a very effective issue, used to bring more people to engage in ethnic conflicts by spreading propaganda on both sides. The fourth underlying factor is cultural differences such as tradition (*adat*) and daily customs. These, too, were used to spark conflicts between two or more different ethnic groups. Based on the lessons learned from Poso and Maluku,

ethnic conflicts may occur because traditional institutions such as *sintiwu maroso* in Poso and *pela gandong* in Maluku were weakened during Indonesia's transitional period when abrupt changes occurred in many state regulations such as *otonomi daerah* (decentralization). As a result, these institutions are no longer as effective as they used to be in settling disputes among people.

Finally, the two case studies of ethnic conflict, in Maluku Island and Poso in central Sulawesi have revealed some valuable lessons about ethnic conflict in Indonesia. First, the larger ethnic conflicts stemmed from small individual clashes involving economic issues or alcohol abuse, and no one could have predicted that these conflicts would escalate. Second, once the conflict erupted, it got out of control and quickly spread into other areas. Third, the outcomes of the conflicts were devastating because the damage both material and to people's lives left many people isolated because of their ethnicity and religion. Fourth, the escalation of conflicts into larger-scale ethnic conflicts was partly because local courts and police and security forces failed to properly address the initial disputes according to existing laws. Fifth, the prolonged conflict was hard to control because of the existence of cyclical revenge within and between warring parties and the involvement of third parties and conflict entrepreneurs, which continued to undermine the government's reconciliation efforts.

## **B. RECOMMENDED MEASURES**

Based on my case studies of ethnic conflict in Maluku and Poso, I would like to recommend some measures for preventing future ethnic conflicts in Indonesia. There are three major divisions within the Indonesian government and one significant element within Indonesian society that have to work closely together in order to complement each other when dealing with potential ethnic-conflict areas. These four major elements are the local governments, the local Indonesian police and armed forces, local courts, and local religious and community leaders. All these elements can play a huge role in preventing initial conflicts triggered by local and national crises from escalating into large-scale ethnic conflicts.

An equally important issue in dealing with future ethnic conflicts is how the central government delegates the command and control in the prevention of conflicts to the local governments and, at the same time, increases their capabilities for dealing with

the underlying factors within their territories that could potentially trigger political, economic, social, religious, and cultural conflicts, or local tribal disputes. Following are some recommended measures that would be helpful in preventing future ethnic conflicts in Indonesia. I have drawn these measures from the lessons learned from the two case studies, ethnic conflict on Maluku Island and in Poso, Central Sulawesi.

### **1. Recommended Measures for the Indonesian Government**

In general, the central government needs to encourage and increase the capabilities of local governments for dealing with future ethnic conflicts within their territories. To do so, the central government needs to delegate its command and control to local governments and to watch for the existence of potential ethnic conflict carefully due to its domestic policies in local areas.

### **2. Recommended Measures for Local Governments**

All Indonesian regional governments, at least at the provincial and district levels, need to gather and maintain up-to-date information within their territories that covers politics, social-economic conditions, religion, culture, education, and demography statistics that can be accessed by the public and all government agencies when formulating national or regional policies. This, in the long run, will reduce the possibility of conditions arising that might cause conflict among local people and, at the same time, it will effectively boost local development.

The local governors and district heads should be the highest local authority, so that they are able to closely coordinate with local police and armed forces in formulating the best security strategies to prevent future ethnics conflicts, before implementing local security policies such as requiring everyone to have just one ID or setting up checkpoints for regular or random traffic checks.

Local governments need to support local police and armed forces and equip them with, at least, a minimum number of support facilities in order to help them to conduct their security tasks, acquiring communication tools and patrol vehicle, and accessing local government information for security purposes.

Local governments have to make sure that if there is a conflict within their territories; they will not become part of the conflict but, instead, will be part of the solution to the conflict.

Local governments need to encourage local religious and community leaders to regain their former roles in settling local conflicts rather than taking them to local courts. This method had proved effective in the past in settling many local conflicts throughout Indonesia, such as dealing with traditional water distribution and land allotment.

Local governments also need to help rebuild communities that were damaged because of conflict such as in Maluku, Poso, and Kalimantan.

### **3. Recommended Measures for Local Police and Armed Forces**

Local police and armed forces personnel need to have knowledge of the ethnic conflicts in Indonesia. They need to know how the conflicts erupted and eventually escalated into larger conflicts. In order to do so, local police and armed forces should establish cooperation with local universities and their scholars who have been researching ethnic conflicts in Indonesia for quite some time.

Local police and armed forces need to increase their intelligence personnel capabilities for dealing with ethnic conflict issues. By doing so, local police and armed forces can function better as a proper “early warning and early detection” system within their local community in dealing with the issues of local ethnic conflict.

Local police and armed forces need to also function as a “deterrence force” to prevent local people or outsiders from creating conflict within their respective territories. This can be accomplished by joint patrols and regular joint exercises involving local governmental agencies.

If there is a conflict that could potentially trigger a large-scale ethnic conflict, local police and armed forces have to be well coordinated so that they can prevent the spread of conflict and can make sure all personnel follow the existing procedures without initially resorting to coercion.

Given their important roles as local security forces, local police and armed forces have to be well equipped and well trained in dealing with potential ethnic-conflict issues.

Equally important, they have to maintain their neutrality while performing their jobs and become problem solvers, rather than part of the problem itself. This is a very important measure because it will enhance the local people's confidence in local security forces and will not become anarchic when settling their conflicts.

#### **4. Recommended Measures for Local Courts**

Local court personnel have to be provided with knowledge of ethnic conflicts in Indonesia so they will more easily identify which cases could potentially trigger ethnic conflict, such as case involving traditional methods of water distribution and land allotment, alcohol abuse, individual or inter-group clashes based on ethnicity, and violation of public orders during political campaigns based on ethnicity and religious affiliation.

Local courts backed by security forces have to conduct fair and impartial trials immediately in all potential ethnic conflict cases before any conflict spreads and escalates into a large-scale ethnic conflict.

#### **5. Recommended Measures for Local Religious and Informal Leaders**

Local government and security elements and local religious and community leaders need to establish a forum for regular inter-faith and cross-cultural dialogue. They need to inform local people about the consequences and impact of settling local conflicts by resorting to coercion, as was the case of Maluku, Poso, and Kalimantan.

Local religious and community leaders have to realize that their roles in preventing ethnic conflict are essential within their communities and that no religious or individual statement from the leaders should provoke local people to resort to violence in order to settle a conflict. They need to encourage people, particularly in areas where severe ethnic conflict has broken out, to be more tolerant and respectful of each other.

Given their roles as local leaders, religious and community leaders need to be able to settle various local conflicts through local traditional laws. This measure needs the participation of local governments to support and encourage local leaders to do so in order to prevent future ethnic conflicts. Traditional laws, when dealing with local conflicts, have proven effective in settling local conflicts before 1998, such as *Sintuvu Maroso* in Poso and *Pela Gandong* in Maluku.

All of these recommendations were drawn from lessons learned in the case studies I did of ethnic conflict in Maluku and Poso from 1998 onward. Their purpose is to eliminate possible political disputes, economic and social disparities, religious and cultural differences, and tribal clashes before they arise. By giving local governments and religious and community leaders more powerful and by making local police, armed forces, and the courts more knowledgeable and responsive to local issues, future conflicts can be reduced if not eliminated completely. In short, conflict resolution rather than escalating the problem should become the main focus in resolving all conflicts. It is my hope that these recommendations will reach the hands of those directly responsible for making national policy.

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